Submission to

Inquiry into School Libraries and Teacher Librarians

from the

Australian Library and Information Association

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Introduction

We welcome the opportunity to contribute to the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR) *Inquiry into School Libraries and Teacher Librarians.*

We thank the Federal Government for the recognition that the Building the Education Revolution (BER) is not just about physical infrastructure. We are pleased that the Government has responded to calls from the library and information sector for a review focusing on school libraries and teacher librarians.

The Australian Library and Information Association (ALIA) is the peak body representing the library and information services sector. It represents 6000 members, the library and information profession, Australian library and information services, and the interests of over 12 million library users.

ALIA is committed to promoting the free flow of information and ideas in the interest of all Australians and a thriving culture, economy and democracy.

We support the development of a 21st century information infrastructure with libraries as the conduit for a sustainable knowledge economy.

This submission strongly supports the separate submission from the Australian School Library Association (ASLA) with whom ALIA works in partnership on issues concerning school libraries and teacher librarians.

Other contributors to this submission include the ALIA Schools Group, the joint ALIA/ASLA Policy Advisory Group, and current practitioners.

ALIA and ASLA are looking forward to working with the Federal Government on implementing the Inquiry recommendations.

Structure of this submission

Each term of reference is addressed. The appendix includes several case studies that cover three best practice libraries, a remote library without a teacher librarian, a private religious school and parents' perspectives.

There is a substantial bibliography which is a collection of the recent body of work and research that exists about school libraries and teacher librarians.

The role of libraries

ALIA advocates the development of an informed society that can partake of and participate in skilled decision-making. Accurate, relevant and timely information is the key ingredient to effective decision-making. Australia's long-term economic development is dependent on its ability to use information to make decisions that enable growth, progress and productivity.

Libraries and the library profession contribute to an informed society by acquiring, organising, archiving, retrieving, using, synthesising and analysing information and thereby empowering users so that they can utilise this information in their decision-making processes.

School libraries sit within the broader structure of the Australian library infrastructure. This infrastructure includes: the National Library and state libraries, university and TAFE libraries, public libraries, school libraries and special libraries (eg government department, health etc.). The collections from these libraries are supported by professionally produced catalogues, indexes and abstracts, a national bibliographic database (Libraries Australia), a national schools database (SCIS), digital preservation, interlibrary loan, and database consortia arrangements all of which underpins world class research, creativity and innovation.

The infrastructure includes not only physical infrastructure such as buildings, fitouts, computer hardware, collections, but also the infrastructure for staffing, communications including digital communication, transport and service networks.

Australians are supported in their development of literacy/reading, education, business, community and digital access through a network of approximately 1,522 national, state and public library service points. Australians use these libraries heavily – they made over 108 million visits in 2005-06. In addition Australians benefit by services provided by approximately 9,000 school libraries, 42 university libraries, technical and further education libraries, health libraries, law libraries and other special libraries.

Library and information services professionals are committed to the following core values:
- Promotion of the free flow of information and ideas through open access to recorded knowledge, information, and creative works.
- Connection of people to ideas.
- Commitment to literacy, information literacy and learning.
- Respect for the diversity and individuality of all people.
- Preservation of the human record.

ALIA policies and research in school libraries

The key principle for the Association in relation to school libraries is commitment to the principle that school library and information programs and services are integral to the mission, objectives, and teaching and learning goals of the school, and provide the foundations for lifelong learning.

The two national peak bodies for school libraries, ALIA and ASLA, have already committed substantial funds and efforts to the development of policies, guidelines, standards and publications for school libraries and teacher librarians. They collaborated on the funding and production of *Learning for the future: developing information services in schools*, 2nd ed – a seminal text heavily used by Australian schools and library staff. The two peak bodies have funded a revised edition of this document which will become available later in 2010.

The professional standards of excellence for teacher librarians, developed by ALIA and ASLA, is a significant body of work and is used extensively across Australia as the main standards document. These standards were developed as part of the move towards teacher standards.

ALIA and ASLA together with Edith Cowan University funded the Australian School Libraries Research Project in 2008. This project produced two reports: *Snapshot of Australian School Libraries* and *Snapshot of Australian Teacher Librarians.*
http://www.chs.ecu.edu.au/portals/ASLRP/publications.php

The ALIA Schools Group, together with the Victorian Catholic Teacher Librarians (VCTL), produced *A manual for developing policies and procedures in Australian School Library Resource Centres.* This manual supports the professional practice of staff in school library resource centres.

The role of teacher librarians

The teacher librarian is a leader within the educational community.

Teacher librarians support and implement the vision of their school communities through advocating and building effective library and information services and programs that contribute to the development of lifelong learners.

A teacher librarian holds recognised teaching qualifications and qualifications in librarianship, defined as eligibility for Associate (i.e. professional) membership for the Australian Library and Information Association (ALIA). Within the fields of education and librarianship, teacher librarians are uniquely qualified. This is valuable because curriculum knowledge and pedagogy are combined with library and information management knowledge and skills.

The teacher librarian is both an educator and an information manager with integrated understandings from both areas. Professional staff qualified in teacher education and librarianship (teacher librarians) are responsible for both shaping and reflecting the school's objectives with respect to library and information programs and services.

As an integral partner in the school's teaching and learning team, the teacher librarian has a role in the planning, implementation and evaluation of education policies, curricula, learning outcomes and programs, with particular reference to the development of learners' research and information literacies.

The valuable role of the teacher librarian focuses on:
- learners and learning
- teachers and teaching
- resourcing the curriculum
- facilitating access to information
- developing the physical environment.

   Source: ALIA/ASLA statement on teacher librarians in Australia
   http://www.alia.org.au/policies/teacher-librarians.html

To achieve these five areas, teacher librarians have to:

- understand learners and their needs
- collaborate with teachers to plan and implement information literacy and literature programs
- ensure the school library collection supports the school curriculum and community
- use technologies as teaching and learning tools
- create effective learning environments
- participate in the school and wider learning community.

Source: ALIA/ASLA statement on teacher librarians in Australia
http://www.alia.org.au/policies/teacher-librarians.html

Having access to electronic information can never replace the contributions to learning provided by teacher librarians. The role of school information services and teacher librarians are key factors in the improved delivery of curriculum outcomes, attainment of the goals of education, promotion of literacy and reading, information literacy, technology use in schools and the curriculum, cybersafety education, provision of print and digital resources, and lifelong learning.

Paraprofessional staff with specialised technical training (library technicians) manage the processes and operate the required library systems and methodologies to ensure access to resources. Others staff without recognised qualifications provide clerical support needed to maintain the efficient functioning of library and information programs and services.

Both professional staff – teacher librarians, and support staff – library technicians, are needed for the effective functioning of the school library. Because of state based school arrangements, other qualified librarians work in some school libraries.

Equitable access to information

The lack of consistency across Australia with regards to school libraries, staffing and resourcing typifies the Australian school library system. The effect of this is that Australian students do not have equitable access to information and apart from the issues of justice, fairness and the right to education, this reduces educational learning outcomes. The lack of equitable access to information has the greatest impact on students from families at low socio-economic levels, on NESB students, and on Indigenous students.

There is disparity among schools in close proximity, like-sized schools, and schools within the same sector. The disparities include:
- whether there is a school library
- hours of staffing
- qualifications of library staff
- skills of and PD opportunities for library staff
- budget
- amount and appropriateness of space
- funding for print and online resources
- teaching of information literacy skills.

The reasons for the lack of consistency include: levels of funding, discretionary funding prioritisation by governing bodies of schools, unavailability of qualified library staff, ignorance of the beneficial educational outcomes from having school library services and teacher librarians, and lack of professional development opportunities for library staff. All levels of government and school systems need to be involved to ensure equitable access to information and equitable educational opportunities for all Australians.

Terms of Reference

Term of Reference #1

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

Building the Education Revolution (BER)

The infrastructure investment in school libraries through BER has been enormous and through collaboration between the Government and professional bodies such as ALIA and ASLA, there is a valuable opportunity to put the rest of the pieces in place to ensure a significant return on that investment for our community and for the nation.

The recent BER National Coordinator's Implementation Report reported that there have been 3,089 projects for school libraries as part of the Primary Schools for the 21st Century (P21). This is for buildings and facilities that are being maintained, refurbished or constructed. It is not clear how many projects are for new libraries. However, the policy for library infrastructure and buildings gives no indication how new libraries will be staffed and resourced to suit the learning needs of the school community.

Who will manage, organise and maintain the physical environment? Who will resource the curriculum in collaboration with teachers? Who will coordinate reading resources and literacy programs across the school? Who will teach the essential information literacy skills? Who will provide resources about cybersafety?

To achieve maximum benefits from the BER for school libraries, the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR) must:

- provide adequate resources to make the physical spaces more effective
- act on the recommendations from submissions to this Inquiry
- take into account the issues raised in the public hearings
- implement the final recommendations from the Inquiry
- establish a unit in the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR) to design and deliver programs that will implement the Inquiry recommendations and capitalise on the significant funds already invested in the Inquiry process.

Digital Education Revolution (DER)

The provision of laptops to students has several impacts on the wider community and has implications for school libraries and public libraries. Information and digital literacy skills are required for the effective use of computers and internet access, and these are skills that are taught by teacher librarians in collaboration with teachers. Physical access to computers is not enough – students need skills to use them appropriately and this is the work of teacher librarians. Teacher librarians also have an important role in providing professional development in digital technologies to teachers.

Some students from low socio-economic families may be allowed to take their laptop home to a family environment where there is less likelihood of internet skills. Parents may seek to develop computer and internet skills through their local public library.

The increased use of computers and access to the internet brings with it an increased and urgent need to educate students about cybersecurity and cybersafety issues. Consideration must be given as to how parents and families will access these important messages about cybersecurity and cybersafety.

The DER provides for online curriculum tools and resources that support the Australian Curriculum and specialist subjects such as languages. Teacher librarians assist teachers to identify the resources, and then integrate the online tools and resources into the school's information management system. Teacher librarians are also specialists in supporting teachers to embed the use of technology in the curriculum. Schools without a library or without adequate staff in the library will be disadvantaged in their capability of using these resources and tools to their maximum benefit.

Furthermore, training and professional development for teachers, including ongoing assistance, in using specific resources may also be unavailable in schools without a library or sufficient library staffing.

The DER also funds support mechanisms to provide vital assistance for schools in the deployment of ICT. In many schools, the teacher librarian is responsible for or at least integral to the deployment of ICT.

Other federal government policies

Closing the Gap

The Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR) already has a range of programs to improve literacy outcomes as part of Closing the Gap that was developed from the *Mapping literacy achievements: results of the 1996 national English literacy survey.* These outcomes could be enhanced if the Department were to involve all stakeholders in literacy. All libraries, especially school and public libraries, are part of the solution and should be involved in the Department's programs at the planning and implementation phase. Case study #4 gives a stark insight into obstacles to improving Indigenous literacy.

Smarter Schools

Two of the Smarter Schools initiatives, Foundation skills in literacy and numeracy and Supporting disadvantaged students, are areas where school libraries and teacher librarians can have a major impact. The role of school libraries and teacher librarians in supporting literacy and disadvantaged students is addressed later in this submission.

Australian Curriculum
Teacher librarians are specialists in resourcing the curriculum and are involved in building and maintaining physical and electronic school library collections. Schools without a teacher librarian or without adequate staffing may not be able to implement the Australian Curriculum through the resourcing and teaching of the 'general capabilities'.

NAPLAN
Improved literacy outcomes have a direct effect on higher levels of student achievement. School libraries and teacher librarians have a very valuable role in supporting literacy across the school. This is addressed in depth under the Term of Reference #2.

Term of Reference #2

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

Higher student achievement

There is much research evidence from the US, Canada, Britain and Australia that students attain higher levels of achievement when there is an adequately resourced school library staffed by a teacher librarian.

> 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.
>
> Lonsdale, M 2003, *Impact of school libraries on student achievement: a review of the research, report for the Australian School Library Association*, ACER, Camberwell, Vic., p. 27.
> http://www.asla.org.au/research/Australia-review.htm

School libraries can make a positive difference to students' self-esteem, confidence, independence and sense of responsibility in regard to their own learning.

Other ways in which teacher librarians contribute to higher levels of student achievement include providing programs to assist students in the transition from primary to secondary school and secondary to tertiary studies; assisting in the development of literacy programs for ESL students and their parents.

Two of the key research findings from the Lonsdale study relate directly to the management of the school library resource centre. These are that the quality of the collection has an impact on student learning and that test scores are higher when there is a higher usage of the school library resource centre. Financially, the school library resource centre's print and electronic collection represents a huge investment.

Information literacy

Information literacy skills include:

1. defining information needs
2. locating information
3. selecting information
4. organising information
5. creating and sharing information
6. evaluating information and the information process.

> Source: ALIA/ASLA 2001, *Learning for the future: developing information services in schools*, 2nd ed. Curriculum Corporation, Carlton.

Within each of these six steps, there is a matrix for the information literacy skills and the ICT literacy skills that need to be explicitly taught for each level from 1 to 6 (representing the levels in the Australian Curriculum).

Teaching information literacy skills and working with teachers to embed these skills into the curriculum and into student learning is a core focus for teacher librarians. Teacher librarianship courses provide extensive training in this specialist area. Knowledge of the curriculum, teaching strategies and learning styles are integrated with knowledge of information systems and technologies.

Information literacy is the foundation of lifelong learning and is a basic survival skill for personal, educational and economic success in the 21st century. Information literacy promotes social inclusion.

> A thriving national and global culture, economy and democracy will best be advanced by people who are empowered in all walks of life to seek, evaluate, use and create information effectively to achieve their personal, social, occupational and educational goals. It is a basic human right in a digital world and promotes social inclusion within a range of cultural contexts.
> *Alexandria Proclamation on Information Literacy and Life Long Learning*, Egypt, 2005 http://www.ifla.org/III/wsis/High-Level-Colloquium.pdf

The exponential growth of electronic information resources is increasing the need for information skills training. Information literacy skills give individuals the capability to recognise a need for information and access, locate, select, organise, present and evaluate that information efficiently and effectively.

Effective learners are people who are able to find and use information as required. It can be said that effective learners are those who are information literate.

Schools without a trained teacher librarian are less able to provide a learning environment in which educational and social goals are maximised for the benefit of students and the nation.

Lifelong learning

In recent years the renewed significance of learning throughout life – lifelong learning – has led to school libraries focusing on information literacy. This is due to lifelong learning being recognised as vital in times of dynamic social and technological changes

in communities and workplaces. Acknowledgement of the value of information literacy is driven by new technologies, changing patterns of work, globalisation, family and community mobility, health issues, and the explosion in available information.

The importance of literacy

The importance of literacy is indisputable. Adequately resourced school libraries with qualified teacher librarians are instrumental in supporting this important goal. It would be a grave disservice to young Australians and one could say even irresponsible to not do everything possible to enable the achievement of literacy levels that would allow their future participation in the Australian economy and society.

The UNESCO statement on literacy rates literacy as a human right, a tool of personal empowerment and a means for social and human development. Educational opportunities depend on literacy.

> Literacy is at the heart of basic education for all, and essential for eradicating poverty, reducing child mortality, curbing population growth, achieving gender equality and ensuring sustainable development, peace and democracy. There are good reasons why literacy is at the core of Education for All (EFA).
>
> A good quality basic education equips pupils with literacy skills for life and further learning; literate parents are more likely to send their children to school; literate people are better able to access continuing educational opportunities; and literate societies are better geared to meet pressing development.
> http://www.unesco.org/en/literacy/literacy-important/

The development of literacy skills is crucial for students' future participation in the Australian economy and society. Australia already has a substantial challenge with adult literacy. The Australian Bureau of Statistics' report *Adult literacy and life skills survey* (ABS 4228.0, 2006), found that slightly less than half of the Australian population, approximately 7 million, failed to achieve the minimum required level or higher in prose and document literacy.

Libraries and literacies

Rapid social change, the emphasis on lifelong learning, the increasing rate of technological development and the movement towards an information-based society are factors which suggest that literacies are more than ever essential for effective participation in society.

Literacy is more than reading, writing, speaking and listening. It is also understanding and being competent in a range of new literacies – information literacy, ICT literacy, computer literacy, network literacy, and digital literacy.

School libraries, teacher librarians and literacy

Teacher librarians are instrumental in supporting the important goal of literacy.

Schools with a qualified teacher librarian to select appropriate fiction and nonfiction resources, and to promote, design and coordinate literacy, literature, and information literacy programs across the school will improve literacy outcomes for all students.

Literacy outcomes are also enhanced by teacher librarians who provide curriculum support and design resource-based learning programs.

The Government's national literacy testing is evidence of the importance of basic literacy skills (reading writing, viewing and listening).

Students who use technology, particularly the internet, need to be able to read well. To become proficient in the range of literacies, students must be proficient in basic literacy skills. This includes the ability to make sense of what they are reading and to think critically.

The sections on reading, information literacy, boys' literacy and lifelong learning elaborate on the role of school libraries and teacher librarians in the achievement of literacy.

Reading

The technological future will continue to assume the user's capacity to read and understand the written word.

The ability to read is a major factor in determining whether a child will succeed or fail in our education system, and later on in the workplace. We need to ensure that our children have the best beginning – a literate start in life.

Teachers (and parents) encourage reading for very young children, and it is also encouraged in primary and secondary schools. One of vital activities of teacher librarians is to focus on the development and enjoyment of reading.

There is research evidence that 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. Reading enjoyment is strongly and positively linked to student achievement.

Teacher librarians select resources to meet the learning needs of all students. They provide imaginative materials that promote reading motivation. They provide for free voluntary reading, individual reading selection, and reading guidance.

In many schools, teacher librarians coordinate Book Fairs, promote and administer a monthly Book Club, participate in Children's Book Week and state-based student voted awards, and are part of ALIA's National Simultaneous Storytime. These activities support a culture of reading in a school.

What is the use of the Government investing millions of dollars in new library buildings if there are no new books to entice children in, and no teacher librarians to support a reading culture?

National Year of Reading 2012

The Australian Library and Information Association, together with the organisations representing Australia's school and public libraries, is currently scoping the National Year of Reading 2012. This initiative, inspired by the UK's National Year of Reading in 2008, has the potential to join together the many reading and literacy initiatives which already take place in schools, libraries and community venues

The National Year of Reading 2012 will provide a focus for children and young people, and teacher librarians will play a key part in promoting this. Discussions are underway with the Australian School Library Association and the School Library Association of Victoria to partner in the delivery of innovative programs during the year. The success of these initiatives will be driven by having qualified teacher librarians in schools, willing and able to act as champions of recreational reading.

ALIA recommends that the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR) support this initiative as part of the Inquiry's recommendations. A National Year of Reading will enhance the Department's goal of improved educational and community outcomes.

Boys and literacy

School libraries and teacher librarians have a valuable role to play in the range of interventions that have been recommended over the past few years to improve boys' literacy. The Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR) has been active in commissioning research and implementing programs in this area.

Various reports and programs have suggested that literacy resources need to take into account students' varied cultural and ethnic backgrounds and experiences. A wider range of traditional and new communications technologies via spoken language, print, and multimedia need to be included. This means looking beyond standard literacy resources to literacy-related materials from other cultures, including contemporary commercial youth culture, integrating a wide range of modes of expression (oral, written, electronic, musical, visual, and so on).

Teacher librarians have as a core practice – and indeed, it is their expertise – the development of services and the identification of resources that meet the specific needs of their users.

It has been recommended that to improve literacy outcomes for boys, schools need school systems' cooperation to provide increased levels of learning support, professional development and technology infrastructure and support. School libraries and teacher librarians are therefore ideally placed to make a difference in boys' literacy outcomes.

Digital literacy

Our technological society requires student to have digital literacy skills. This means that not only can students use a computer to do word processing and spreadsheets, but can also create, read and write digitally in order to access the internet, find and edit digital information, participate in electronic communications, and use online information and communications networks.

These techniques are most effective when the teacher is digitally literate as well. Teacher librarians teach digital literacy skills to both students and other teachers alongside information literacy skills. Such skills include verifying credible sources online and how to cite electronic sources. Issues such as copyright and plagiarism are also included.

Health literacy

The ABS survey *Health Literacy, Australia 2006* (ABS 4233.0) demonstrates that there is a very serious low level of health literacy in Australia: approximately 60% of people had difficulty with tasks such as reading dosage instructions on a package of medicine, or drawing a line on a container indicating where one-third would be.

The ability to access and use health information is a fundamental skill which allows people to make informed decisions and helps them to maintain their basic health. On a broader level, adequate levels of health literacy may help to reduce some of the costs in the health system, prevent illness and chronic disease, and reduce the rates of accident and death.

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. Improved literacy can have a significant impact on a person's health and on the Australian economy.

The school library as a social hub for the school and wider community

The school library serves an important function as a social hub in schools which enhances the community of learning thereby contributing to improved education and community outcomes.

The school library is a safe supervised place for students where they can relax away from formal classes or a busy playground. School libraries are places for playing chess at lunchtime, a meeting place for the yearbook committee, a display area for student work, etc.

The school library uniquely links children across different abilities, years, age groups, and subject areas in a community of learning. School libraries promote social inclusion within the school community.

The school library also acts as a communications hub; in many schools, teachers, parents, students and members of the wider community gather in the library to work together on issues or projects.

Public libraries and literacy: synergy with school libraries

While the current submission is concerned with school libraries, it is essential to highlight the synergy and partnerships between public and school libraries in the area of literacy. All types of libraries, especially public, school and academic (university and TAFE) libraries, contribute to higher levels of literacy and to improved educational outcomes.

Public libraries offer a large range of literacy resources and services that meet the needs of local communities. The provision of literacy programs for adults means that the children of these adults will grow up in a literate family environment which will complement and extend schools' literacy goals.

Public libraries' contribution to adult literacy includes programs and resources for non-English speakers, skills development in computer and internet use, internet access, and assistance in completing online forms for government agencies such as Centrelink. Computer and internet skills training is critical for disadvantaged families, the

unemployed and low income people who are more likely to have lower literacy levels and no computer at home and so are dependent on institutions such as public libraries for their access.

Apart from adult literacy and the flow on effects from this, public libraries are heavily involved in early literacy through programs such as storytelling, transition from home to formal learning settings, storytelling visits to Indigenous communities, and mobile libraries visiting remote and rural communities.

Literature

Through ALIA as a national professional association, school libraries contribute to improved educational and literacy outcomes by participating in ALIA's annual National Simultaneous Storytime.

National Simultaneous Storytime is a campaign organised by the Australian Library and Information Association, in which a picture book, written and illustrated by an Australian author and illustrator, is read simultaneously to children in a variety of venues around Australia.

This campaign promotes the value of books and encourages young people to read, share books and become involved in other fun and engaging literary based activities. The campaign is an integral part of promoting the value of reading and literacy within Australian society.

In 2009, over 120,000 children and adults across Australia took part in National Simultaneous Storytime, reading the book *Pete the Sheep*, written by Jackie French and illustrated by Bruce Whatley.

The continuation of this unique literary and literacy campaign is dependent upon sponsorship and ALIA seeks support from the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR) in order to be able to continue to promote the value of reading and literacy to school children through this campaign.

Term of Reference #3

The factors influencing recruitment and development of school librarians

Currently there is a shortage of qualified teacher librarians in schools across Australia. Teacher librarians are an aging population with serious issues associated with succession planning and sustainability.

ALIA and ASLA continue to work together to compile statistics and other relevant data. However, ongoing funding is required to undertake regular surveys in order to develop a more longitudinal perspective of the issues.

There are two main issues:
   a. people with teaching qualifications who wish to qualify as a teacher librarian
   b. qualified librarians who wish to undertake teaching qualifications.

There are only a few institutions which currently prepare teacher librarians in recognised Graduate Diploma and Masters Level courses. All courses are available only by distance education and are all at the graduate level. Usually a teaching qualification, sometimes with experience, is an entry prerequisite.

Opportunities and pathways for currently qualified librarians to undertake teaching qualifications should be a focus of research funded by the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR) as a result of this Inquiry. ALIA and ASLA, as the national professional associations and as key stakeholders, would be able to make a significant contribution to these discussions. Programs to implement these alternative pathways would be promoted by both associations and would help with the shortage of qualified teacher librarians.

Scholarship or sponsorship programs would also assist some teachers or librarians who wish to retrain but who cannot afford to take a year or more off for study.

Many schools have libraries which are run by library technicians, and library officers or parents who are not qualified to provide the educational components. The reasons for this situation may include: insufficient funding, discretionary priorities in funding, and ignorance or unvalued policy about teacher librarians by state governments.

The ASLA/ALIA teacher librarian professional standards clearly indicates teacher librarians need to know about learning and teaching across curriculum areas and developmental levels, as well as have specialist knowledge of information, resources and technology associated in the school/education environment.

In a teacher librarian course as compared with a straight librarianship course, more emphasis is required on collection management of digital collections and their learning architecture - including content or learning management systems, IP rights and copyright, censorship, creative commons, multiple formats and delivery modes.

Teacher librarians need to know about current online cataloguing tools, the importance of federated searching methods and access to multiple thesauri in automated systems for information retrieval; the role of XML and metadata for systems integration and

relational database services; or the conversion and compatibility issues for legacy systems and open source applications. Teacher librarians may be the only staff member with conceptual understanding of the library catalogue within a school's intranet. For example, teacher librarians may have to incorporate purchased catalogue records for video-on-demand delivered over the school's IP by importing its associated metadata into the school's learning management system.

Library technicians, assistants and teacher aides

A related issue is the employment of teacher aides in school libraries in the roles of library technicians and library assistants. The potential of school libraries would be enhanced by further training of teacher aides to fully qualify them as library technicians and library assistants. School libraries and teacher librarians would have a more professional support base which would lead to better outcomes.

Recruitment

ALIA and ASLA already commit substantial resources to careers advice and information, and career fairs. A national recruitment campaign is necessary to extend ALIA and ASLA's efforts. This would be an integrated approach that would incorporate career fairs and resources for school career counsellors to target school leavers with clear pathways for retraining mature age teachers and librarians to become teacher librarians. Ideally this campaign would be implemented once alternative pathways for retraining have been discussed and negotiated, particularly for currently qualified librarians who wish to undertake teaching qualifications.

Professional development

Professional development is a shared responsibility between the teacher librarian, the employer and trainers to ensure that teacher librarians have the opportunities to develop and update skills and enhance services.

This is especially important in the current digital environment where new technologies are constantly being introduced, new online resources are available, and new opportunities in integrating technology and curriculum are being enabled. Changes in Australian education brought about in part by Federal Government policies such as the BER, DER and the Australian Curriculum also require school library staff to keep up-to-date through professional development opportunities.

ALIA works collaboratively with educators, employers and training providers, practitioners and the community to identify and promote continuous improvement to ensure the library and information profession is recognised as strong, vibrant and above all responsive to clients' changing needs.

The Association has developed tools and resources such as the ALIA PD scheme and formally recognises members who participate in the scheme.

The employer also has a responsibility to provide opportunities for ongoing learning through effective staff development programs. Educators and training providers also have a role in identifying training opportunities.

The ALIA Schools Group is active in organising professional development workshops and seminars. The topics addressed in these events are carefully planned in order to meet the needs of teacher librarians and to provide relevant coverage of current issues

and trends; for example, the implications of resourcing the Australian Curriculum will be the focus of a seminar later this year.

Additional funding is required to further develop professional development opportunities that align more closely with developments and changes in both pedagogy, curriculum and librarianship.

Term of Reference #4

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

There are many bodies involved in supporting and partnering school libraries. They include:

- government agencies such as Education Services Australia
    - established through the merger of Curriculum Corporation and Education.au Limited
    - aim is to provide efficient education services to meet the future needs of all education sectors, particularly in relation to the implementation of national initiatives such as the National Curriculum and the Digital Education Revolution
    - the role of teacher librarians in relation to both of these national initiatives has been discussed earlier in this submission

- national schools database: SCIS (Schools Cataloguing Information Service)
    - available now through Education Services Australia
    - essential resource for school libraries

- telecommunications centres in rural and remote areas
    - rural and remote areas may have fewer public or school library services and fewer internet access points to enable participation in the digital economy

- from primary to secondary to university education
    - for primary schools, the partner is the local secondary school and its library
    - for secondary schools, the partner is the university and its library

- university libraries
    - universities are responsible for providing library services to the students who are the product of primary and secondary schools
    - students who come to university with information literacy skills acquired during their primary and secondary education, achieve better outcomes

- Universities Australia
  - one of their aims is to study the issues and needs of Australian universities and their relations with other education institutions, organisations and the community

- public libraries through partnerships with schools
  - Under the Term of Reference #2 earlier in this submission, the synergy with regards to literacy between school libraries and public libraries was discussed. Public libraries provide programs for early literacy, adult literacy, ESL, etc.

- industry partners and suppliers
  - school libraries are their clients and they meet client needs through the supply of resources and online resources
  - consortia deals to improve affordability for school libraries
  - Superclubs Plus is a safe, actively protected, online social learning network for students aged 6-12 years; a consortia deal is necessary to extend coverage Australia wide

- National and State Libraries Australasia (NSLA)
  - National Library of Australia and state libraries have a role in education and research, and the provision of online resources
  - 'Inside a Dog' – programs for schools through the Centre for Youth Literature, State Library of Victoria

- Electronic Resources Australia (ERA)
  - a national licensing consortia that covers all Australian libraries and delivers quality online resources to support business, vocational, government, educational and community activities

- DEEWR
  - supports school libraries and literacy through its National Literacy and Numeracy Week
  - supports school libraries in their literacy activities through Smarter Schools
  - supports school libraries and teacher librarians through this Inquiry into School Libraries and Teacher Librarians and through their recognition of the important role of school libraries and teacher librarians in supporting improved educational outcomes

- Federal Government departments dealing with literature, the digital economy, and social inclusion
  - the Federal Government has a role in involving and coordinating stakeholders, including coordination across different Federal departments. An example is the issue of cybersafety where there are units in several departments which are running different programs

- cybersafety programs through ACMA and the Department of Broadband, Communications and the Digital Economy
  - ALIA has worked with ACMA to produce a cybersafety guide for library staff (and a revision in 2009)

- state curriculum support services
  - source of support for school libraries
  - varies from state to state

- COAG
  - COAG decisions concerning education, health, Closing the Gap, new technologies' impact on schools and school libraries

- Parents
  - parents are concerned about improving literacy skills, boys' literacy, teaching children how to learn, cybersafety and cyberbullying, the role of the school library as a social hub for the school and wider community, support for families particularly those from lower socio-economic backgrounds, a well resourced library staffed by qualified teacher librarians

- Multicultural groups in the wider community
  - they have an interest through schools' ESL programs and school library ESL resources

Term of Reference #5

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

There are many issues relating to digital technologies in the school library environment. They include cybersafety, the implementation of the National Broadband Network, essential skills for the digital economy, digital literacy, information literacy, availability of quality online resources, and copyright and IP.

Training and supporting teachers
The Federal Government's computers for students program does not include training for teachers or students.

In many schools, it is the teacher librarian who provides:
- specialist knowledge, support and professional development training for staff in how to use and embed digital technologies into curriculum
- resources about appropriate use of a wide range of digital resources and technologies, including cybersafety, cyberbullying, privacy, identity theft, etc
- access to a range of digital resources and delivery formats which support the development of high quality literacy programs in schools.

Skills for the digital economy
In a digital world, a thriving national and global culture, economy and democracy will best be advanced by people who are empowered to seek, evaluate, use and create

information effectively to achieve their personal, social, occupational and educational goals.

Social inclusion

Information literacy skills promote social inclusion and lifelong learning.

Cybersafety

The Federal Government is very active in developing policies and programs to protect children in the online environment. School libraries are extremely valuable and crucial partners in facilitating the delivery of the content. Children need to be taught about appropriate use of a wide range of digital resources and technologies, including cybersafety, cyberbullying, privacy, identity theft, etc.

Parents are genuinely concerned about issues of cybersafety and their children. Schools and parents need to work closely to address this issue. In the school setting, teacher librarians are in the best position to provide this support and to facilitate the availability of this content across all years. School libraries are also the platform to facilitate professional development to teachers in this area.

Access to quality online resources

To be able to work effectively in the digital economy, Australians need access to quality information resources and services.

Electronic Resources Australia (ERA) is administered by the National Library of Australia as a not-for-profit Australian library consortium. The purpose of ERA is to enable Australian libraries to collaboratively purchase full-text electronic resources for their clients. ERA was developed in response to recommendation 9 of the Senate's October 2003 report on *Libraries in the Online Environment*.

Through ERA's cross-sectoral collaboration (national/state/territory, academic, specials, public, TAFE and school libraries), Australian libraries stand to achieve the greatest common good for all Australian library users. In an era of the internet and ever-expanding electronic services, direct and immediate access to online information is fundamental to a well-informed, educated, economically competitive and democratic society.

It is necessary to develop a funding model and a cost structure to enable school libraries to have access to these full-text electronic resources. At present only a small number of schools can afford these resources and we recommend that the Government's digital education program assist in funding these resources to support a quality outcome for students and teachers.

National Broadband Network

ALIA believes that, with its high usage of electronic information services and access points, the library and information sector is a major stakeholder in the national broadband strategy.

Schools and school libraries have a critical role in the development of skills for the digital economy. Teacher librarians have a great depth of expertise in providing access to electronic resources and services, embedding electronic resources content in the curriculum, and developing users' skills. Information literacy and ICT literacy skills are

essential for participation in the digital economy, and these skills are a key focus for teacher librarians.

School libraries and teacher librarians = Smarter Schools

The Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR) website states that the Australian Government is committed to an education system that pursues excellence for all Australian schools and where every child receives the highest quality education.

Major reform priorities set by the government include raising the quality of teaching in our schools, ensuring all students are benefitting from schooling, especially in disadvantaged communities, and improving literacy and numeracy outcomes.

In partnership with the states and territories, the Australian Government has entered into National Partnerships in the key areas of addressing disadvantage, supporting teachers, and improving literacy and numeracy.

These key areas exactly match the key contributions of school libraries and teacher librarians towards the goal of the highest quality education.

- *Pursuing excellence*
  There is much research evidence from the US, Canada, Britain and Australia that students attain higher levels of achievement when there is an adequately resourced school library staffed by a teacher librarian.

- *Supporting teachers*
  Teacher librarians support teachers in many ways including: resourcing the curriculum in collaboration with teachers, providing specialist knowledge to embed digital technologies into teaching the curriculum, training teacher staff in the use of information, and providing specialist support materials (curriculum statements, professional journals, research information, current awareness services, etc).

- *Improving literacy outcomes*
  Teacher librarians are instrumental in supporting the important goal of literacy. Schools with a qualified teacher librarian to select appropriate fiction and nonfiction resources, and to promote, design and coordinate literacy, literature, and information literacy programs across the school will improve literacy outcomes for all students. Literacy outcomes are also enhanced by teacher librarians who provide curriculum support and design resource-based learning programs.

- *Addressing disadvantage*
  Students from lower socio-economic groups often require assistance in attaining higher levels of information literacy and academic skills development. School libraries offer equitable access to all students and provide resources to meet the specific needs of their school community.

See *Case study: Rural ('very remote') NSW school* for an insight into the difference a school library with a qualified teacher librarian could make for a disadvantaged school. The Government's policy seeks to improve educational outcomes for Indigenous students – facilitating programs for placement of teacher librarians in remote or rural schools such as the one in this case study would immediately improve literacy and therefore educational outcomes.

The establishment of a school library unit within DEEWR

Considering the close alignment of the goals of Smarter Schools with the role of school libraries and teacher librarians, ALIA recommends the establishment of a school library unit within the Smarter Schools program. The unit would initially serve to coordinate the implementation of the recommendations of this Inquiry in collaboration with ALIA and ASLA. The unit could also facilitate effective communication and the establishment of links between various levels of government and other institutions when supporting school communities.

Working together to achieve the Federal Government agenda

ALIA is a major stakeholder in the library and information sector representing all libraries including school libraries and teacher librarians.

ALIA has contributed to the Federal Government agenda in the areas of: supporting educational standards and professional development, social inclusion, democracy and citizenship, literacy, and cybersafety. ALIA provides submissions to government inquiries thereby contributing vital expert and evidence-based advice. ALIA's contribution leads to greater effectiveness of the government in the development of more informed public policy.

To maximise improved educational and social outcomes for young Australians, ALIA and ASLA should be represented on committees and programs for all issues impacting on school libraries and teacher librarians. These issues include: literacy, reading, Indigenous education, information literacy and digital literacy.

Recommendations

ALIA recommends:

1. that the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR) work with ALIA and ASLA, the national professional bodies and major stakeholders in school libraries, on the implementation of this Inquiry's recommendations and on all issues relating to school libraries and teacher librarians, improving literacy outcomes, and cybersafety education

2. funding for research in school libraries to cover statistics, standards for resourcing and staffing, best practice, and resources for the school library community

3. provision of additional data about school libraries from the Building the Education Revolution (BER) so that ALIA can contribute to further discussions relating to impact

4. the establishment of a unit within the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR) to implement the recommendations of this Inquiry, possibly within the Smarter Schools initiative.

5. the development of a new funding model to ensure that there is a teacher librarian in every school

6. support for professional development opportunities for teacher librarians and other school library staff

7. that the Department of Education, Employment & Workplace Relations (DEEWR) supports and funds a marketing campaign to recruit currently qualified teaching and librarianship graduates into teacher librarianship

8. increase teacher librarian educational options and pathways in universities

9. the development of a national information literacy curriculum as part of the Australian Curriculum

10. that the Australian library and information sector, and in particular school libraries, is recognised as a major stakeholder in providing vital infrastructure and skills for Australia's digital future and in particular, for the implementation of the National Broadband Network

11. a new federally-funded model to provide access to online resources available through Electronic Resources Australia (ERA) at an affordable price for school libraries

12. the development of an integrated model of school library support for rural and remote areas to include recruitment and professional development

13. that the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR) work with major stakeholders like ALIA to determine impacts of the Digital Education Revolution (DER) and to develop programs in relation to digital literacy and access

14. that the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR) involve ALIA and school libraries as stakeholders in addressing the issue of Indigenous literacy

15. that the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR) supports ALIA's national literacy and literary campaign, National Simultaneous Storytime

16. that the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR) supports ALIA's initiative of a National Year of Reading in 2012; this initiative aligns with the Department's goal of improved educational and community outcomes by joining together the many reading and literacy initiatives already happening in Australia.

Conclusion

The key principle in this submission is that there should be a teacher librarian in every Australian school in order to achieve the best educational and social outcomes for all young Australians, and to ensure their lifelong participation in the Australian economy, culture and society.

The key issues include:

- School libraries staffed by teacher librarians are critical for higher levels of student achievement
- School libraries with qualified teacher librarians inspire and support literacy and reading
- Teacher librarians have an important role in teaching – teaching information and digital literacy skills and partnering with teachers to resource, enrich and expand the curriculum
- Teacher librarians facilitate the effective participation of students in the areas of cybersafety, cyberbullying, identity theft, privacy, etc.
- School libraries and teacher librarians are leading the way for technology use in schools and in the curriculum
- School libraries are the social hub of the school and are safe supervised places.

The role of school information services and teacher librarians are key factors in the improved delivery of curriculum outcomes, attainment of the goals of education, promotion of literacy and reading, information literacy, technology use in schools and the curriculum, and lifelong learning.

Having access to a well resourced school library and the services of a fully trained and qualified teacher librarian is the right of every student in an Australian school. The provision of the school library facility and the employment of a qualified teacher librarian in every school is the responsibility of the federal and state governments of Australia, and is in the national interest.

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APPENDIX 1: Case studies

Case study 1: Santa Maria College

Type of school: Catholic Secondary Girls 7-12
Location: Inner city Melbourne (Northcote, Victoria)
School population: 940
Staffing: 3 full time teacher qualified librarians + 2.2 EFT library technicians
Multicultural: 54 different nationalities
Library seating: 116
Number of computers available to students in library:
                   29 desktops and 14 laptops (35 in total)

Information Literacy Program
The Information Literacy Program at Santa Maria is an important feature of the learning culture of the College. The Program involves Library staff and subject teachers planning, teaching and evaluating units of work for students in Years 7 to 10.

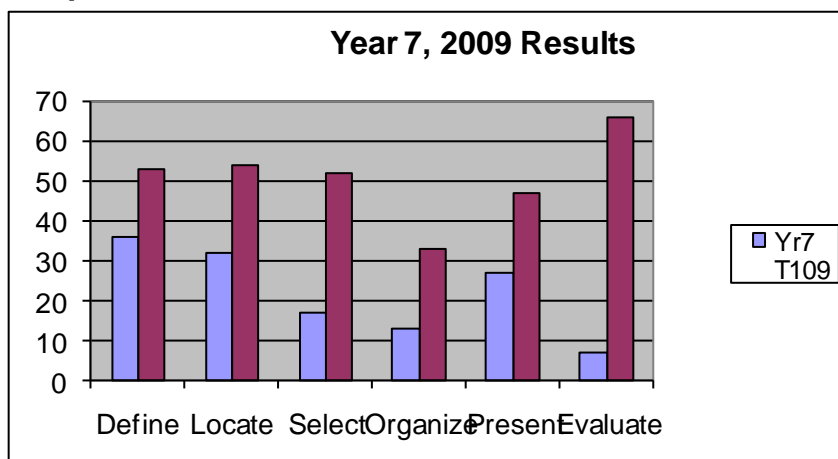As a result of this cooperation, research assignments are developed to:
- Introduce and reinforce the skills involved in the six steps of the *Information Process.*
- Support students as they explore the content matter of the various subjects.

Through completing these research assignments, the students consolidate and extend their information literacy skills.

Progress during Year 7 and Year 8 2009
Library staff members tracked the students' progress in Years 7 and 8 by collecting and analyzing data from an Information Literacy Survey that was developed in-house. Table 1 below shows the results of the two surveys completed by the Year 7, 2009 students in Term 1 and Term 4.

Table 1
Comparative results Year 7 Term 1, 2009 and Term 4, 2009

This table shows an improvement in all six steps of the Information Process: define, locate, select, organize, present, evaluate. The improvement in the select and evaluate steps is of particular note: select relates to the development of notetaking skills and evaluate refers to the ability to reflect on learning that has taken place.

For Year 8, 2009, the data showed an overall improvement of 23% in skills between the first survey completed as Year 7 students in February 2008 and the third survey completed as Year 8 students in November 2009.

Progress during Year 9, 2009
All students in Year 9 completed the Santa Maria College Library Services and Program Evaluation Survey in November. The survey, which was developed by researchers from Rutgers University in the United States, consists of 48 Help Statements about the various ways in which effective school libraries help students to learn. Students assign Help Ratings to each Statement that range from Most Helpful to Not Helpful.

The surveys were completed electronically via the College portal. The data in Table 2 below came from the students' ratings of the help provided by the Santa Maria College Library Information Literacy Program.

Through these evaluations, the Library is able to demonstrate its value to student learning, especially the progress of students towards independent learning.

Table 2
Online survey results 2009

Survey Help Statements	Total %
The school library has helped me know the different steps in finding and using information.	99%
The school library has helped students know how to use the different kinds of information sources (such as books, magazines, CDs, websites, videos).	99%
The school library has helped students put all the ideas together for their topics.	98%
The school library has helped students work out the main ideas in the information they find.	98%
The school library has helped students get the first facts about their topics.	97%
The school library has helped students learn more facts about their topics.	97%
The school library has helped students when they do not understand some things they learn about.	97%
The school library has helped me work out the questions for the topics I am working on.	97%
The school library has helped me find different sources of information for my topics (such as books, magazines, CDs, websites, videos).	97%
Computers in the school library have helped students do their schoolwork better.	97%

Case study 2: St Michael's Catholic Primary School

Type of school: Catholic Primary School – Prep – Year 6
Location: North Melbourne
School population: 127 children Prep – year 6 (77 families claim EMA)
Staffing: .4 qualified teacher librarian (2 days per week) + 2 hours per week volunteer parent
Multicultural: 101 children English as a second language
Collection: 8,500 items (includes books, multimedia, curriculum, maths equipment)

The role of the teacher librarian at St Michael's is very diverse. It includes a 6 hour teaching component, overseeing the development of the collection and the central resource management of all school resources. The central resource management of all resources enables the budget to be allocated to areas of need and has allowed the school to build up the resources over time. It also ensures there is equity of access to the resources of the school at all times.

The teacher librarian is required to resource the curriculum needs of the classroom teachers and the recreational reading needs of the students. There is also a great need to support both teachers and students in developing information literacy skills and to support parents in the use of online resources and selecting books for their children.

The library program for the year P-6 students is focussed on 3 key areas: literature, information skills and book/resource selection. As many of our students only access books from the school library enhancing their knowledge of authors, genres and literary gems. Promotion of reading through running Book Raps, the Book Week festival and regular children author/illustrator visits is vital. So too is linking up with the classroom teachers program (opportunities to link in with the teachers planning time is essential for this to happen), in particular the Integrated Curriculum units to teach the students information literacy skills.

The school community highly values the library as a resource and a place where children learn about books and can learn valuable skills to enable effective use of the many online resources they have access. More importantly, they learn the skills to be discerning about which resources can best help them now and in the future.

Case study 3: Presbyterian Ladies' College (PLC) Melbourne

PLC is a P-12 independent girls' school situated in the eastern suburbs of Melbourne with a student population of approximately 1500 students.

Library Services at PLC consists of the Junior Library, Senior Library, Audio-Visual Department and Archives. Staffing of these areas consists of 5 teacher-librarians, 2 Librarians, 6 technicians and 1 staff member who acts as Heritage Manager.

PLC Library Services demonstrates teacher librarian best practice in the following ways:

- Resource provision within the context of a school environment supporting the teaching and learning needs of staff and students.
- Access to resources in a wide variety of formats in order to cater for differentiated learning styles.
- Information Literacy skills instruction in collaboration with classroom teachers within the context of research topics.
- Curriculum support - curriculum mapping or research topics combined with information skills expected at each year level.
- Informed and current knowledge of new technologies and implementation of these technologies where relevant. Use of Web 2.0 technologies such as blogs and wikis in a learning context.
- Educating students to become discerning digital citizens.
- Management and development of a virtual presence in resource provision.
- Professional development of staff in the use of online resources, new technologies and all library services.
- Indepth and current knowledge of literature both for curriculum needs and recreational reading.

Case study 4: Rural ('very remote') N.S.W. school

Type of school: Government - Pre-school to Year 12
Location: Rural NSW – classed as very remote and disadvantaged
School population: 138 children – 99% Indigenous
Staffing: 0
(without a teacher librarian or library technician since mid 2009)
Budget:

This is a case study of a central school in rural N.S.W. It is in a rural town of approximately 630 people, which is 200 km from the nearest regional centre. The school has 138 students with 99% of them being indigenous. The location is classed as "Very Remote" and the school is listed as disadvantaged.

The teacher working in the library as a teacher librarian during 2009 was a temporary first year out PE teacher without specialist library training. The library collection was in need of upgrading, and the "teacher librarian" began a weeding process in mid 2009. She then left the school a few months later (when her temporary funding ran out) without finishing the weeding, or ordering replacement material. There was also a large backlog of new and needed teacher resources, and the existing teacher resources were left uncatalogued and scattered in several locations.

None of the remaining staff had library training and the library fell into disuse and was closed. Students had no access to the collection. One of the school clerical assistants was interested in restoring the library to a usable condition, but lacked the skills and training to do so.

The school has been participating in career development programs with the primary health care team at a University Department of Rural Health located at the regional centre. One of the University staff involved was a trained librarian (although not working in a library at the time). With the assistance of this librarian, the school clerical assistant has received some very basic training and has commenced work on the collection (although the school library still remains closed as of April 2010). Further training on an informal basis is being arranged with schools in the regional centre. Strategies for the cataloguing, housing and updating of teacher resources are being investigated.

A teacher librarian has not been appointed, and there seems little prospect of this happening in the near future. A temporary teacher, appointed from May 2010, has shown some interest in the library situation, but is not a trained teacher librarian, and is only funded on a term-by-term basis.

Information literacy skills are not being taught in the school, and lack of access to the library greatly inhibits the ability of the students to complete assignments. At the last census, only 27% of households in the town identified as having any internet access, and there is no public library, meaning that alternative sources of information are unreliable at best.

The case highlights a number of areas of policy concern:

- Workforce issues are crucial in remote areas. These areas are often perceived as unattractive, and recruiting staff is difficult (for several months in 2008, the school also had no member of staff specialising in mathematics).
- Central schools are often seen as a low priority for allocation of specialist teacher librarians (or other specialist teachers).
- School staff often cover other areas in a caretaker role. There is little formal support or training for staff in remote areas forced to be caretaker librarians.
- School libraries are often crucial in rural communities (and sometimes perform the dual function of also housing the public library). Where internet provision is still unreliable, and there is no (or a very-part time) public library, the school library can be the sole outlet for teaching information literacy skills. The skills of a trained teacher librarian are crucial in these situations, but, in comparatively small rural schools, appointment of a teacher librarian is often considered a low priority by educational authorities.

- Schools in remote areas and especially, in remote indigenous communities, often have lower levels then average of literacy and numeracy, and the school library is very important in efforts to "close the educational gap". There needs to be staffing strategies which ensure continuity of school library staff in such communities, and to ensure that such staff have the skills to address the information literacy problems with which they are presented.

- School librarians have an important role in the provision, organisation and assessment of teacher resources. If this function is not fulfilled, then there is a flow-on effect which negatively impacts in all aspects of the teaching program. In rural schools with small resource budget, effective use of the limited financial resources is crucial.

- Education policy has a heavy emphasis on upgrading school facilities and buildings. Library resources and appropriate staffing are equally important if educational outcomes are to be achieved.

- The Closing the Gap strategy aims to reduce Indigenous disadvantage with respect to life expectancy, child mortality, access to early childhood education, educational achievement and employment outcomes. This can only be achieved if there is equal access to educational facilities and information literacy. A school staffing policy which denies remote and indigenous communities the benefits of trained school library professionals is a policy which will ensure the Gap in education will never be closed.

Case study 5: Private religious school

My school is a Coptic Orthodox school, serving families of mostly Egyptian origin, but we also have some Sudanese and Lebanese families.

The school is small, with only 320 students from Prep to Year 12. The total staff, including admin, is around 30.

In previous years the budget allocation has been quite generous, with around $5000 for primary resources, and $4000 each for secondary and general, with the latter covering materials such as covering and labels. The 2010 budget is being reviewed and I do not have the outcome yet.

The library catalogue lists around 11,300 items; approximately 1,250 of these items are readers located in primary classrooms.

The library serves both primary and secondary and is quite small, only the size of two standard classrooms, and both groups have their breaks at different times so sharing the space is tricky sometimes.

Every primary class has a weekly library lesson with their teacher where they come to borrow books. The younger grades are read a story, while the older students often do library related worksheets.

There is a computer room and VCE study room off the library.

Once a term I run activities for primary students, such as a questionnaire about library rules, with house points being awarded for correct answers.

The bookfair comes at the end of Term 2 and from this, students can buy their books, with a percentage of the commission earned being used to purchase more books for the library.

To help students prepare for the bookfair, every May I am sent reading record sheets and I turn this into a competition, by allocating house points and prizes for completed sheets that are returned at the end of the month.

The library is vital for my school community because a lot of the newly arrived families to Australia may not have access to books otherwise.

Case study 6: NESB student (a parent's perspective)

Sam came to Australia, a bewildered, sad and frightened little seven year old boy whose biological mother had died, whose father had to send him to the orphanage when he was too ill to look after him, and then chose to allow him to be adopted.

At first he had no idea why I would sit him next to me and point at the pictures in the picture books, also pointing my finger to show him the way the letters were read (left to right, top to bottom) and he had had no experience of being read to (the parents must have been very poor, books were a luxury and libraries not available, which is what will happen here to many children if we pull the plug on libraries in schools) but he very quickly cottoned onto the fact that it was a pleasurable experience and that the pictures were telling a story and he was being informed and entertained. I would point at a truck (for example) and say "Truck" and he would repeat the word and surely but slowly he gained words to be able to describe his experiences, life and feelings. I dream that one day he will write an autobiography of his life and I feel sure that books and reading will feature as a key which unlocked his solitude and confusion.

If only people can imagine being seven years old, sent to live with strangers who spoke another language, writing in a completely different way to the characters he had begun to learn, eating food that was unappetising to him, sending him to school among children who had their own issues and were not able to show him kindness and mercy - I think you will understand why I feel so passionately about the role of libraries to allow children to flourish and thrive. Books showed him other children whose lives had been blighted and how they overcame their adversities. Having the ability to speak, read and understand the world around you is so fundamental that we don't even question it.

Many Australian children live in deprived homes where the parents cannot afford to buy books for their children to help them become avid readers and do their homework. I could not have afforded to buy all the books which Sam read to enable him to talk to me and be able to participate in school (I moved him after one term from the NESB school to a mainstream English school where he was surrounded by English and there was a school library that was pivotal to his improvement).

Case study 7: 10 year old student (a parent's perspective)

I am currently working as a library technician and am studying to become a librarian. I started my library career as a volunteer at my sons' school library.

For my studies, I needed some resources from the university library. I took my 10 year old son along with me. I had the titles of the books I wanted and he was able to search for them using the OPAC, find the call numbers and then retrieve the books, despite never having been to the university library previously. I expressed my surprise at his ability, and he very casually said that it was similar to the OPAC at school.

Having taken adults through some library orientations previously, it struck me that due to the efforts of the library staff at his school, my 10 year old was already ahead of the information literacy game. Both schools he has attended have well-stocked and well-staffed libraries employing teacher librarians, technicians and assistants. It is their continued contribution to his education that will stand him in good stead for either further study or the workforce.

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