

### **Teacher Librarianship: At the Crossroads**

Teacher Librarians and the profession of teacher librarianship throughout Australia are currently facing a crisis. This paper is not to apportion any blame as to why this is so, but to illustrate the current issues facing teacher librarians and to work towards finding solutions.

Some faith has been lost in our national library associations to advocate on our behalf. Procrastination appears to thwart professional associations who must be proactive in these times of diminishing funding, poor perceptions of a teacher librarian's role and in at least NSW, an imminent wave of retirements.

Teacher librarians, particularly in primary schools, often work alone - some with little support or understanding from the principal and teaching staff. Do current teacher librarianship courses prepare new graduates for working in such isolation, with little opportunity for guidance and mentorship from more experienced colleagues? Are there differing needs in both skills and training for primary school and high school teacher librarians?

Consider the allowable practice of employing a teacher to manage the school library with no library qualifications – then (if you are a NSW DET teacher) being offered the 'fast track' post graduate course. How well does this course really equip graduates with the skills and knowledge to manage a school library and its collections? School library assistants also have little or no formal library training, while the NSW DET does not recognise the qualification of Library Technician/Officer. Other states recognise the qualifications of a library technician and yet choose to employ them in preference to a teacher librarian.

Although it has been proven in several studies that a well resourced school library and a qualified teacher librarian can make a difference to student achievement, why then do teacher librarians feel it necessary to constantly justify themselves (and /or their libraries) to principals and other staff in regard to their role within a school? Nationally, no standards exist for the funding of school libraries to enable them to be well resourced and maintained. Instead, it remains the decision of the principal to decide how much of the school's global budget will be directed to the library. Clearly, national standards for both the funding of school libraries and the employment of qualified teacher librarians are needed.

How do we attract new recruits to a profession whose numbers are in decline and then not only educate them well, but provide them with support and affordable ongoing training when they receive employment?

Maintaining a balance between the dual roles of both teacher and library manager is both challenging and rewarding. It can also be immensely frustrating and isolating.

#### **Recommendations:**

- ALIA/ASLA to work with TAFE to develop and promote short courses for school library assistants
- Teacher librarians involved in both the design and accreditation of teacher librarian courses

- ALIA and ASLA to work together to promote teacher librarians as both educators and information professionals within ALIA membership. Increase the focus of teacher librarianship on the ALIA website and in publications such as 'Incite'.
- Promotion and advocating for teacher librarians and their dual roles at principal conferences, in education journals and within the public forum to educate and inform.
- Lobby teacher and public sector unions regarding the need to recognise the qualification of library technicians (particularly within NSW).
- Lobby teacher unions, governments and MPs regarding a minimum acceptable qualification of a teacher librarian enabling employment within a school. This is to include the standards of excellence already provided by ALIA/ASLA.
- Lobby governments and members of parliament to establish national standards for the funding of school libraries
- Lobby Ministries of education to fund research investigating the effects teacher librarians and school libraries have on student achievement and literacy.
- Lobby Ministries of Education to collect data on the qualifications of teacher librarians and school library support staff.
- ALIA/ASLA to create opportunities for teacher librarians to meet more often in capital cities to discuss issues and plan for solutions
- Liaise with teacher education course providers to educate their students on how a teacher librarian may support them once employed
- Ensure every new teacher librarian graduate is supported by an experienced, qualified mentor teacher librarian

As a passionate, yet concerned teacher librarian, I trust the Education and Workforce Summit will support teacher librarians throughout Australia through the discussion and examination of these current issues.

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14<sup>th</sup> March, 2008