

# Response to the Australian Productivity Commission draft report on Schools Workforce.

G. R. Phillips, 15 February 2012

We would like to call your attention to the relevant information already collected through a federal inquiry into school libraries and teacher librarians which resulted in the report *School libraries and teacher librarians in 21<sup>st</sup> century Australia* (March 2011). Available

<http://www.aph.gov.au/house/committee/ee/schoollibraries/report.htm>

387 submissions and 13 public hearings resulted in a wealth of information which can contribute to the following areas of the Schools Workforce study:

## DATA COLLECTION

- There is a great need for accurate and complete workforce data regarding teacher librarians and staffing, scheduling and budgeting of school libraries by sector. See School Library Inquiry Report Recommendation 8.
- This needs to indicate whether or not a school has a teacher librarian, possible date of retirement, level of training, time allocated to the library or to the classroom. This should not be merely the principal's subjective view of need for a teacher librarian, especially when such staffing may be governed by funding restrictions.
- The ACT P&C submission to the Productivity Commission states "The vast majority of teachers are relatively older and are not being replaced by a new cohort of young teachers." This is particularly affecting the teacher librarian profession.
- The increasing number of teacher librarian responsibilities given to para-professionals in libraries (WA as a particular example, where library officers, for the most part, are in charge of primary school libraries.).
- Extant Australian data:
  - "In terms of specialist teaching areas in primary schools, the highest unfilled teacher vacancies in late 2006 were in Special Needs ..., Languages Other than English..., and Library (5% of schools for about 400 teachers)." Library vacancies were increasing during the year. (Staff in Australia's Schools 2007, ACER, 2008)
  - The Australian School Libraries Research Project (ASLRP) (Combes, 2008) showed that 35% of government school libraries had no teacher librarians.
  - Submissions to the House Committee school library inquiry included statistics:
    - Tasmania: 29 qualified TLs out of 125 K-10 schools (2010 ASLA Tasmania Sub to House Inquiry (#121)

- ACT: “almost 50% of primary schools do not have a qualified teacher librarian” (in AEU submission to House Inquiry #113) and so on
    - A Feb 2012 NT response to Parliamentary Questions on Notice revealed 13 qualified TLs in the 151 NT government schools.
    - A 2008 SA survey reported no teacher librarian allocation in 23% of government schools (SLASA). Further positions are being lost since the recent award.
- An example of the type of information on school libraries which is useful for decision makers is the annual US school library survey *School Libraries Count!* (American Association of School Libraries) <http://www.ala.org/aasl/researchandstatistics/slcsurvey/slcsurvey>

#### ROLE OF THE TEACHER LIBRARIAN

- The changing role of the 21<sup>st</sup> century teacher librarian (TL) and strategic job design was covered by the Inquiry Report, Section 3 and on pp.88-89.
- The role of TLs in curriculum design and implementation, particularly in relation to the new Australian curriculum was covered by the Inquiry pp. 33-34.
  - “Schools might allow for differentiated roles and levels of responsibility among their teachers. For instance, some teachers could be given greater responsibilities over issues such as curriculum design and implementation, allowing other teachers to focus more on the quality of their interaction with students. “ (Draft report, page 129)
- The role of TL networks and professional associations in managing innovation and supporting change in schools. Strong national, state and local networks of teacher librarians are instrumental in supporting their roles in curriculum support and promotion of reading.
- Role of the teacher librarian in school-based professional development, including cyber bullying, Digital Rights Management, copyright, ethical use, cyber safety, etc. See Inquiry sections on digital literacy and on iCentres. Also a plethora of professional literature.
- The *Standards of professional excellence for teacher librarians* <http://www.asla.org.au/policy/standards.htm> (ALIA/ASLA, 2004). TL winners of national and state teaching awards.

#### ROLE AND TRAINING OF LIBRARY OFFICERS, LIBRARY TECHNICIANS, AIDES

Needs also to be considered. Some information in the Inquiry Report, pp. 70-71.

#### TEACHER LIBRARIAN TRAINING

- The need to reinstitute at least some of the 10 university teacher librarian training programs lost in the past two decades (Inquiry Report pp. 73-75) in order to fill the possible 3000 positions vacant. Principals who want TLs and can afford them often can not find applicants.

- The content and registration of teacher librarian university courses. Inquiry Report 73-75 and the supporting related submissions from Charles Sturt University, Edith Cowan University lecturer and ASLA.
- Recommended initiatives to address shortages: pathways, federal funding support, scholarships. Inquiry Report pp. 77-80.
- Inclusion of a unit of study in pre-service teacher education related to collaborative information literacy teaching and the teaching role of the teacher librarian, including a practicum collaboratively taught unit of work with a teacher librarian mentor (Examples at [connect2tls.com](http://connect2tls.com). See also work done in Canada by M. Asselin. Also Inquiry Report 5.24).

## RESEARCH

- There is a wide range of research linking the staffing of qualified teacher librarians to improved student outcomes. (Inquiry Report, Section 3).
- Performance evaluation of teacher librarians, including evidence of student outcomes needs to be addressed. Eg Qld Developing Performance Framework for Teacher Librarians <http://education.qld.gov.au/staff/development/performance/employee/teacher-librarians.html> Procedures for managing underperformance of teacher librarians. For example, Dr. Ross Todd's work on Evidence Based Practice.
- The NSW DET submission to the Productivity Commission (Sub 014) raises a number of questions in relation to information gaps or research needs.
  - "To map the current needs of the schools workforce, detailed and accurate data on the characteristics of schools and their workforces is needed. A number of econometric studies have been undertaken internationally, to evaluate the effects on school and student outcomes using detailed quantitative and qualitative data. These studies tend to focus on a series of factors, including:
    - School finances;
    - School workforce characteristics (age, qualifications, experience, etc.);
    - School dynamics (size, class size, allocation of teaching methods, etc.) and
    - A combination of student, parental and community characteristics.
  - The primary purpose of these studies is to gauge how current school resources achieve improvements in student and school outcomes. A comprehensive study of this kind is yet to be conducted in Australia for the purposes of schools resourcing and would be a welcome resource for school workforce planning."
  - Such a study should include data on teacher librarian staffing, qualifications, and scheduling and library budgets, such as the
  - Longitudinal studies for US school libraries. School Libraries Count! Conducted by the American Association of School Libraries over the past five years <http://www.ala.org/aasl/researchandstatistics/slcsurvey/slcsurvey>

## SUPPORT

- The role of central agencies, and of school principals, in supporting development and evaluation of effective school library services and effective teacher librarians. Inquiry Report pp. 80-83; pp. 102-104.
- In the absence of state or territory central school library advisory agencies (except in WA and NSW), the central role might be assigned to a national agency, such as a National School Library Commission. School library workforce research and pilot studies could be undertaken, evaluated and disseminated through such a body or through AITSL. At a minimum, an online clearinghouse could facilitate information and research sharing. Inquiry Report 5.49: It is “suggested that DEEWR establish a unit with the Department to focus on school libraries and teacher librarians, and coordinating policies and benchmarks for 21<sup>st</sup> century learning skills.”
- Inquiry Report 5.50 “At present there is no designated area within the DEEWR that deals specifically with issues for school libraries and teacher librarians” (p. 103).

## PRINCIPALS AND AUTONOMY. Points for consideration include:

- The calibre and training of principals as it relates to effective school library programs.
- Effects of school based management and under-funding on the staffing of teacher librarians. Evidence supporting the decline in teaching staff and increase in non-teaching staff in school libraries as a result of school based staffing and restrictive funding.
- Moves toward SBM have yet to demonstrate pedagogical basis. The Schools Workforce draft report only states “Strengthening leadership at the school level could improve student outcomes” (p. 137). While we wholeheartedly agree that improving principal understanding of the links between teacher librarians and literacy and quality teaching is needed as part of improving leadership and decision-making skills (“without the right leadership skills in place, the potential benefits of school autonomy are considerably less likely to be realised.” p. 138), there is no evidence to suggest that school-based staffing improves student outcomes, especially without increases in staffing funds. Quite the opposite would seem to be true. [Note the results of Independent Public School program on school library staffing in WA. Many teacher librarian positions are being sacrificed.]
- We agree with the APPA that principals need ‘well-developed and future-focused decision-making and management skills’ that can ‘lead the community’ and ‘the ability to supervise and mentor staff’, requiring ‘a thorough knowledge of curriculum and pedagogy together with the experience to be actively involved in teacher professional development’ (sub. 41, p. 5), including an understanding how to develop best practice libraries and teacher librarians for improved quality teaching and learning.
- The National Professional Standard for Principals (AITSL) include:

“Knowledge and understanding: Principals should be aware of relevant and contemporary education sector research, as well as applicable laws and policies, and know how these should be applied in the school environment.”

Although Australian school principals have been responsible for their school library services since the 1960s when Commonwealth programs put them into all schools, they have rarely systematically been given the tools and research needed to build effective services, including performance evaluation of teacher librarians. The importance of literacy and information use in building a strong and gainfully employed citizenry demands this gap be filled.

## REDUCING EDUCATIONAL DISADVANTAGE

Strong and consistent evidence exists that the role of excellent school library services with qualified teacher librarians can overcome the disadvantages of low socioeconomic backgrounds, low educational level of parents, and geographic remoteness. Children who have quality school libraries staffed by qualified teacher librarians in their early childhood and primary years are more likely to develop strong literacy and learning skills to carry them through their further schooling and employment.

For equitable learning opportunities, school library services run by qualified teacher librarians must be provided to all school ages and abilities, regardless of religion, race, gender, language, physical or mental impairment, geographic location or socio-economic standing.

School libraries with qualified staff are in a prime position to partner with parents, carers and the broader community to maximize student engagement and achievement.

When teacher librarians and teachers work together, students improve their literacy and academic achievement, their problem-solving and information and communication technology skills. They are more successful in reading and learning, the central aim of education.

## Some Recommendations

- That the longitudinal study include following graduates of Charles Sturt University Masters of Teacher Librarianship program.
- Include the special attributes of teacher librarian effectiveness in the assessment of the national system of performance bonuses for teachers.
- Need for a strong mechanism for disseminating workforce-related research in relation to teacher librarians, including the leadership clearinghouse.
- Data collection on school library staff not be based on principal's subjective view of needs, but on existing staffing

- A central national agency be established to advise on and support development of effective school library services to support literacy and learning
- NPAs assure the retention of specialist teachers, such as teacher librarians
- National standards for school library service to guide school leaders
- Inclusion in pre-service teacher education of a unit of study on collaborative teaching of information literacy and literacy with teacher librarian mentor
- Federal support for increased number of university training courses for teacher librarians, with scholarship support for students
- Support for Australian research into the role and efficacy of school library programs in improving student learning and literacy outcomes