Action Plan: Parliamentary Inquiry

By Cecilie Murray

 Abstract

This interactions piece reprints the action plan commissioned by the School Library Association of Victoria to assist in the association's targeted response to the national Parliamentary Inquiry into School Libraries.

Editor's Note:
In response to the report produced by the Parliamentary Inquiry into School Libraries, the SLAV Parliamentary Inquiry Reference Group discussed ways the Association and its members could respond to the report's recommendations. To facilitate this the SLAV Committee of Management engaged Cecilie Murray of Delphian eLearning to bring together the discussion points and create an action plan. The following article is a version of that plan and it is printed here in Synergy to facilitate further dissemination of the document and to promote engagement with the issues. This document is an exploration of possibilities and it is hoped readers will take up the opportunity to be involved. One way that readers can do this is by joining, and contributing to, SLAV's ning, established to support discussion and information dissemination on the inquiry.

Introduction

> *". . . the school library is the school's physical and virtual learning commons where inquiry, thinking, imagination, discovery, and creativity are central to students' information-to–knowledge journey, and to their personal, social and cultural growth . . ."* (Todd, 2011).

The Report of the Australian Parliament, House of Representatives, Education and Employment Committee's Inquiry into School Libraries and Teacher-librarians in 21st Century Australia was tabled on 23 May 2011. The terms of reference for the inquiry focused on:

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

The report, *School Libraries and teacher-librarians in 21st century Australia*, (House of Representatives Standing Committee on Education and Employment, 2011) is structured around the first four terms of reference, and comments in relation to the last, "**the impact and potential of digital technologies to enhance and support the roles of school libraries and librarians" are embedded throughout the report as appropriate.**

The School Library Association of Victoria has been collaborating with the Australian School Library Association (ASLA) and the Australian Library and Information Association (ALIA) to formulate follow-up strategies at the state and national level.

National Action

National Roundtable Discussions, hosted by ASLA and ALIA, were attended by representatives of all Australian school library associations, including members of the SLAV Committee of Management. Four areas of interest and working parties were established to investigate:

- Development of a 21st century learning policy that supports the new national curriculum;

- Coordinated scholarships and sponsorships for teacher-librarianship education;
- Model of funding and staffing formulae for school libraries; and
- Research and advocacy proposals with particular reference to BER investment and effective return from capital funding.

Since the tabling of the Parliamentary Inquiry Report, progress has taken place on a number of fronts including:

- Online presences established, media releases distributed and work commenced on developing a draft budget proposal for costs related to the recommendations;
- Meetings have taken place with ACARA regarding General Capabilities and a 21st Century learning policy written;
- Cross mapping of AITSL standards and Standards of Excellence for teacher-librarians;
- Discussion commenced to raise issues of pathways into the profession;
- Survey by Softlink correlating school library budgets, qualified staffing levels and NAPLAN results.(Softlink International, 2011)

ASLA /ALIA online presences include:
Facebook – What a difference a school library makes
http://www.facebook.com/pages/What-a-difference-a-school-library-akes/120543444695337
Wiki – What a difference a school library makes
http://schoollibraries2011.wikispaces.com/

SLAV Parliamentary Inquiry Reference Group

SLAV has established a Reference Group to continue collaborating with ASLA /ALIA to lobby for Ministerial action on the Report, and to pursue actions, advocacy and awareness-raising activities that will highlight the importance of the Inquiry's recommendations at the Victorian level. The objectives of the Parliamentary Inquiry Reference Group are to:

- Provide input and support for its representatives on the ASLA /ALIA Roundtable discussions; and
- Identify and implement practical strategies that will ensure that what has come out of the national Parliamentary Inquiry will have a positive impact here in Victoria.

The Reference Group has considered the Parliamentary Inquiry recommendations and this Action Plan provides SLAV with clear strategies that will ensure the recommendations have a positive impact on school libraries and teacher-librarians in Victoria.

Other initiatives

A number of other initiatives are underway that inform and support the direction of the Reference Group in supporting the potential of school libraries and teacher-librarians. Electronic Resources Australia (ERA) is a consortium for Australian libraries for the collaborative purchasing of electronic resources. ERA is conducting a review into the services offered to libraries such as the benefits of working together, developing a core set of products for national licensing and the potential to leverage increased value from national licensing regimes.

The National Year of Reading 2012 (see article in the 'Perspectives: Local' section of this issue), supported by the Australian Government, enables Australian libraries and library associations to collaborate on great things that are already happening around books, reading and literacy, giving them an extra boost, with inspirational programs and events taking place across the country. In Victoria, the State Library, school and community libraries are partnering with writers, schools, publishers, booksellers, employers, child care providers, health professionals and a whole host of other organisations that share a passion for reading, to promote reading and literacy activities.

Softlink has released the results of a recent survey, *Library budgets, staffing and literacy in Australian Schools* (2011) which follow up on the *2010 Australian School Library Survey*. The recent study looked into Australian school library budgets, qualified staffing levels and NAPLAN literacy results. This follow-up survey has allowed

Softlink to compare and report the findings from both surveys. Softlink's survey reveals that school libraries are suffering reducing budgets, fewer qualified staff, significantly less funding for primary school libraries than secondary, and a "significant positive relationship between a school's NAPLAN reading literacy score, the budget and staffing allocated to the school library"(Softlink International, 2011).

Structure of this document

This document is organised according to the four focus areas identified in the Parliamentary Inquiry Report which are based on the five terms of reference. Within each of these four areas, there are several recommendations, each of which calls for a commitment to action. Each focus area:

- provides some contextual information on why each area of action is important (drawn from the Report);
- restates the specific commitment to action suggested by the Reference Group;
- provides information on agreed strategies and actions for each recommendation;
- provides information on the role of SLAV in relation to each commitment of action.

Impact of government policies and investments on school libraries

Core set of online databases

Government policies and investment in schools libraries has come from a raft of initiatives. The Digital Education Revolution (DER) is providing ICT equipment and infrastructure for eLearning, curriculum tools and digital resources, and increased bandwidth through the National Broadband Network (NBN). Paired with a range of initiatives to support professional learning for teachers and the adoption of professional standards, the vision is that teachers and teacher-librarians will be better placed to implement the Australian Curriculum.

The provision of new libraries and digital resource centres for schools through the Building the Education Revolution (BER) initiative, pre-supposes an adequate supply of trained teacher-librarians and technical support to leverage the investment for student learning. Access to technologies and the internet require a range of online resources that are available 24/7 for teacher and student use. While limited funding is currently available in jurisdictions and sectors for the provision of online databases, a national approach to the licensing of online databases is recommended in order to provide the resources required to support the Australian Curriculum.

Recommendation 1: *The Committee recommends that the Commonwealth Government partner with all education authorities to fund the provision of a core set of online database resources, which are made available to all Australian schools.*

COMMITMENT TO ACTION 1

The SLAV Reference Group will ensure the recommendation is known and understood by those involved. It will:

- Provide support for the SLAV representatives to ASLA;
- Write to ERA to indicate availability of expertise and knowledge of P-12 online resources;
- Investigate funding models with DEEWR and ERA through work with ASLA;
- Liaise with schools on a process for the selection of diverse online databases;
- Recommend online databases to ERA from which schools may choose those appropriate to their context.

National Digital Literacy Statement

It is broadly acknowledged that digital and information literacy for learning in the 21st century is a key skill for all students and teachers. While issues of cybersafety and cyber bullying are managed at the school level, programs from ACMA, DBCDE and the Alannah and Madeline Foundation are available nationally to support school initiatives. The bigger issues of managing learning resources, both ICT and digital resources within the

school library pose questions around the availability of staff and their participation in leadership roles around digital citizenship. As digital literacy is a key feature of the Australian Curriculum, as important as numeracy and literacy, the need for a nationally agreed policy statement is acknowledged. Competence with new communication and mobile technologies that provide access to a vast array of information resources requires the development of a national policy statement that defines digital literacy. All states have had the opportunity to provide feedback on a draft digital literacy statement developed by ASLA. When it has been ratified by the ASLA/ALIA Boards, it will be disseminated, most likely by the end of 2011.

'Active, participative citizenship in the 21st century requires digital literacy. Digital literacy is the ability to confidently and critically use digital information sources and communications tools and networks for learning, communication, collaboration and creation. Digital

Digital literacy skills are necessary for safe and effective participation in our knowledge-based society and economy.

literacy combines the information skills of locating, managing, synthesising, evaluating, sharing and creating information with the technical skills of effective use of hardware and software applications, networks and other digital communications tools. Digital literacy skills are necessary for safe and effective participation in our knowledge-based society and economy' (School Library Association of Victoria, 2010).

Recommendation 2: *The Committee recommends that the Commonwealth Government works with the states and territories to develop a discrete national policy statement that defines the importance of digital and information literacy for learning in the 21st century, which can be used as a guide by teachers and principals.*

COMMTMENT TO ACTION 2

The SLAV Reference Group will promote information relating to the recommendation amongst teacher-librarians and in school libraries in a range of ways. We will:

- Continue to have input into the development of the evolving policy document being created by ASLA/ALIA;
- Liaise with VCAA to explore the AusVELS cross-curriculum capabilities;
- Align SLAV professional learning strategies with the capabilities outlined in the statement;
- Document, publish and promote digital literacy through:

    – case studies and examples of best practice that support and extend the policy statement;

    – evidence from the Professional Development Program;

    – a 'thumbnail of the day' from conferences that delegates use to report back to their school administration and other staff (eg Link to presentations such as Joyce Valenza's);

    – the Ning to showcase a range of digital projects;

    – elaborations on FUSE projects;

- Demonstrate what digital literacy looks like in a range of ways:

    – Define 'digital citizenship' that supports the ASLA statement on 21st century learning;

    – Identify areas to emphasise digital literacy, trans-literacy, information and digital fluency;

    – Highlight good practice cybersafety programs and netiquette;

    – Identify easy to use copyright and creative commons protocols;

    – Provide resources on research skills, notemaking, bibliography skills;

- Develop templates, such as a 'quality assurance kit for digital resources', that make conscious connections between best practice and the evolving policy statement;
- Disseminate the ASLA Digital Literacy Policy Statement when it is ratified.

School libraries and teacher-librarian contributions to improved educational and community outcomes

Teacher-librarian statistics

Research cited in the Parliamentary Inquiry Report indicated that "students attain higher levels of achievement when they have access to an adequately resourced school library staffed by a qualified teacher-librarian" (House of Representatives Standing Committee on Education and Employment, 2011). According to *School Libraries Work!*, "A substantial body of evidence since 1990 shows a positive relationship between school libraries and student achievement. The research studies show that school libraries can have a positive impact on student achievement, whether such achievement is measured in terms of reading scores, literacy or learning more generally" (U. S. National Commission on Libraries and Information Science, Research Foundation Paper, 2008). These findings have been replicated in Australian research by Lonsdale (2003) and ACER (Masters and Forster, 1997).

The research studies show that school libraries can have a positive impact on student achievement . . .

The recently released Softlink survey, *Library budgets, staffing and literacy in Australian Schools*, reiterates the link between resourcing of school libraries and teacher-librarians and the impact on student achievement levels, citing a positive correlation between 'larger budgets and more school librarian resources, and higher NAPLAN reading literacy results (Softlink International, 2011).

In Victoria, budget cutbacks and devolution of funding have resulted in inadequate school library staffing particularly in primary schools and, therefore, the recent school library and ICT infrastructure investment will not achieve the objectives of the BER and the DER unless adequate staffing ratios are provided. Currently, there appears to be no reliable data on numbers of qualified teacher-librarians.

Recommendation 3: *The Committee recommends that the Australian Curriculum Assessment and Reporting Authority includes statistical information about the breakdown of all specialist teachers, including teacher-librarians, on the My School website.*

COMMITMENT TO ACTION 3

The SLAV Reference Group will promote information relating to the recommendation amongst teacher-librarians and in school libraries in a range of ways. We will:

- Draft a letter to ACARA indicating that SLAV supports the move to include school library and teacher-librarian statistics on the MySchool website to inform future planning;
- Investigate ways to collect statistics from schools on specialist teachers and teacher-librarians;
- Encourage members to provide statistics to SLAV for national information collation.

Encouraging a love of reading

Engagement with reading is the most influential factor in increasing reading proficiency. Teacher-librarians have the skills to engage students as readers – skills that are not replicated by others in the school environment. Teacher-librarians develop diverse reading collections of print and other resources; they have knowledge of digital and multimedia resources; an understanding of the reading abilities and visual literacy needs of students, and the means of connecting students with reading material appropriate to their interests.

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Teacher-librarians are well placed to facilitate a renewed interest in reading by collaborating with the National Year of Reading 2012 initiative.

Recommendation 4: *The Committee recommends that the Commonwealth Government support additional initiatives to promote reading, such as a National Year of Reading. The Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations should collaborate with the Australian School Library Association, Australian Libraries and Information Association and other education stakeholders in developing these initiatives.*

COMMITMENT TO ACTION 4

SLAV commits to support all of the initiatives being created to promote and enrich the National Year of Reading in 2012 including:

- Liaise regularly with the National Year of Reading (NYOR) project officers as a conduit for information;
- Alert all schools to the NYOR 2012 processes, events and resources for teachers and students;
- Highlight each event through newsletters and journals to schools;
- Provide links to the NYOR events on the SLAV website and PLN blogs.

Library programs, digital literacy, student achievement and disadvantage

Parents and students in socioeconomically disadvantaged school communities rely on the school library . . .

School libraries and teacher-librarians provide the overarching bridge in most school communities between the technology, the digital resources and the online world. Parents and students in socioeconomically disadvantaged school communities rely on the school library to provide equitable access to technologies, and on the teacher-librarian to support knowledge and information research skills. Research indicates that a strong library program that integrates ICT and literacy skills and 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.

Recommendation 5: *The Committee recommends that the Commonwealth Government initiates an Australian-based longitudinal study into the links between library programs, literacy (including digital literacy) and student achievement, including their impact on improving outcomes for socioeconomically disadvantaged students.*

COMMITMENT TO ACTION 5

SLAV commits to supporting national longitudinal research that draws on a state-based study, and will:

- Provide to ASLA Ross Todd's longitudinal research documentation as a model to be adopted;
- Request that Ross Todd asks the Center for International Scholarship in School Libraries (CISSL) to prepare a research proposal re student learning and school libraries that can be put to ASLA, ALIA and DEEWR;
- Liaise with Lyn Hay, Charles Sturt University re longitudinal study possibilities;
- Publish the Victorian research conducted by Ross Todd via a case study in school libraries;
- Collect existing data that showcases best practice in the link between the intervention of a teacher-librarian and student outcomes;
- Publish these best practice examples in Bright Ideas blog, *School Libraries Achieving Results*.

Teacher-librarians and leadership in eLearning

With the advent of the emerging mobile technologies and immediate access to communication, connectivity and creation tools, students and teachers require leadership in how to realise the benefits of digital technologies and applications for learning and teaching. With talents that span this whole area, it is within the ambit of teacher-librarians to take up the challenge of leading eLearning within their schools, and to promote their role within the leadership team as critical to the development of 21st century learners. The term 'teacher-librarian' may need to be re-contextualised to suit the role of leader of a digital learning centre, as opposed to a school library.

Recommendation 6: *The Committee recommends that the Commonwealth Government supports promotional activities undertaken by ASLA and ALIA that demonstrate to the school community the valuable work that teacher-librarians are doing in respect of e-learning in their schools, including those that highlight their leadership capacity.*

COMMITMENT TO ACTION 6

SLAV commits to promoting the role of the teacher-librarian as an eLearning leader in their school communities and to:

- Develop a promotional campaign based on *What a teacher-librarian can do for you*;
- Promote the role of the teacher-librarian as influential in leadership and innovation to the parent community;
- Establish a parent lobby group and provide information about the role of the teacher-librarian;
- Promote the role of the teacher-librarian as an 'eLearning leader' in schools;
- Support teacher-librarians in taking on leadership roles within their school communities.

Recruitment and development of teacher-librarians

Training and development

With regard to recruitment and development of teacher-librarians, there is a fundamental lack of quality data to use as a basis for decision making. There is clearly a need to define the role of teacher-librarians into the 21st century and to reposition the status of teacher-librarians in school libraries and the broader community Australia-wide. The Inquiry revealed a perception that some principals either do not understand or undervalue the contributions made by teacher-librarians in many schools, thereby resulting in minimal funding allocated for libraries, amidst competing demands. The role and merit of teacher-librarians is an issue that needs to be addressed, in terms of defining the role description of the 'digital literacy professional' that may assist in raising the status in the school community.

Uniformity of qualifications, tertiary courses and more flexible pathways into the profession to attract new recruits are issues that need to be addressed to support a sustainable supply of teacher-librarians. Professional learning opportunities are essential for teacher-librarians to acquire and develop new skills required of the 'digital literacy professional'. The DER and BER initiatives require skilled teacher-librarians, along with benchmarks and standards for the staffing of school libraries appropriate to the objectives of the Australian Curriculum.

The role and merit of teacher-librarians is an issue that needs to be addressed . . .

Recommendation 7: *The Committee recommends that the rollout of the new national curriculum, which is to be made available online, include a component of training for teacher-librarians.*

COMMITMENT TO ACTION 7

SLAV commits to promoting the knowledge and skills required of teacher-librarians as digital literacy professionals through accredited courses and will work to:

- Lobby DEEWR and the tertiary sector for more accredited teacher-librarian courses Australia-wide;
- Develop partnerships that facilitate shared training opportunities;
- Provide professional learning focused on general capabilities of Australian Curriculum;
- Work with AusVELS to investigate new professional learning opportunities for Victorian teacher-librarians.

Workforce data and role of the teacher-librarian

Evidence tendered to the Inquiry indicated that libraries are not being staffed by qualified teacher-librarians to the same level that they were in the past. New schools tend to be staffed with library technicians. One of the

dominant themes that emerged is a lack of national data relating to staffing issues, specifically determining the actual numbers of teacher-librarians in Australian schools, their qualifications, and part-time/full-time status. DEEWR reports that statistics are gathered on teachers in general, and that specialty teachers including teacher-librarians are not easily identified in the data sets.

SLAV reported to the Inquiry on the discontinuation of teacher-librarian courses that existed until the 1990s, sending a message to those interested in a career in the library and information industry that becoming a teacher-librarian is not an option. The underlying theme emerged is that there is a need to undertake research into the teacher-librarian workforce. Without an adequate evidence base it is difficult to make appropriate recommendations to redress the staffing level issues. It was agreed that a thorough workforce gap analysis of teacher-librarians needs to be undertaken across Australia. The Inquiry was of the view that all stakeholders, including DEEWR, state and territory education authorities and the library associations, should conduct a range of forums across the country with interested parties about what a contemporary school library and teacher-librarian does and should do in a 21st century learning environment.

Recommendations 8 and 9 are complementary, both focusing on the need for a workforce analysis to identify staffing issues, which is linked to perceptions of the role of the teacher librarian, and pathways for training and workforce development.

Recommendation 8: *The Committee recommends that the Commonwealth Government commissions a thorough workforce gap analysis of teacher-librarians across Australian schools.*

Recommendation 9: *The Committee recommends that the Minister for School Education, Early Childhood and Youth, through the Ministerial Council for Education, Early Childhood Development and Youth Affairs, establish a national dialogue, including with tertiary providers, on the role of teacher-librarians today in schools and into the future. The dialogue should include an examination of the adequacy of the pathways into the profession and ongoing training requirements.*

COMMITMENT TO ACTIONS 8 and 9

SLAV commits to supporting ALIA and ASLA in working towards a gap analysis of, and training and development for the teacher-librarian profession in Australia by:

- Lobbying DEEWR on the need for a thorough gap analysis of teacher-librarians;
- Collaborating with ASLA/ALIA on the development of research and data analysis;
- Using the social media crisis data example to collect information on teacher-librarians;
- Seeking information and data from tertiary sector and liaising with Careers Groups;
- Collecting data and preparing a workforce analysis within Victoria;
- Publicising the role of the teacher-librarian and the contribution they make to the school community through a series of forums throughout Victoria.

Partnering and supporting school libraries and teacher- librarians

Advocacy

Nationally, services for school libraries and teacher-librarians are facilitated by DEEWR, ACMA (cybersafety) and ESA (SCIS and EdNA). State and territory governments are responsible for managing schools and allocating staff, and this is particularly important in the light of the investments made in the DER and BER initiatives where new learning spaces and digital learning centres have seen many traditional school libraries transformed into the hub of the school. Providing adequate trained digital learning professionals to cater for student learning in the digital age has become a significant issue for schools. National and state libraries have developed supporting partnerships with school library associations such as the Inside a Dog initiative. It was agreed that there is a need for greater advocacy for school libraries and teacher-librarians within all Australian education departments and sectors, particularly with a focus on policies and implementation of 21st century learning skills and the Australian Curriculum.

Recommendation 10: *The Committee recommends that the Commonwealth Government, through the Ministerial Council for Education, Early Childhood and Youth Affairs, discusses ways to enhance partnerships with state and territory and local levels of government to support school libraries and teacher-librarians.*

COMMITMENT TO ACTION 10

SLAV commits to building and continuing partnerships and relationships through:

- A strengthened partnership with the State Library of Victoria;
- The development of shared initiatives that support the Australian Curriculum;
- Shared initiatives that promote the role of the teacher-librarians and school libraries in the broader community.

School libraries in partnership

"School libraries are cultural community spaces. School libraries, and particularly those which offer a welcoming and ICT-rich space such as those built as a result of the Building Educational Revolution and Digital Education Revolution, are regularly used as parent and community meeting spaces and offer community use of facilities. School libraries and teacher-librarians are therefore very well positioned to ensure that the school and the broader community are connected, that collaborative partnerships are fostered, and that school and community programs and values are shared. Teacher- librarians therefore are pivotal to the cultural development, knowledge-building and community of learning not only within their own schools but can act as a conduit and facilitator for community involvement and partnerships."

Recommendation 11: *The Committee recommends that the Commonwealth Government partners with ASLA and ALIA to produce a document that showcases some of the successful partnerships and programs between school libraries and other libraries, and joint-use libraries. The document should be made available to government and non government education authorities and school principals.*

COMMITMENT TO ACTION 11

SLAV commits to showcasing community partnerships and will:

- Encourage branch networks to embrace community partnerships;
- Develop collaborative programs to highlight connections between school libraries and public libraries;
- Develop other community partnerships, for example, with senior or multicultural groups;
- Promote and support partnerships that encourage participation in the National Year of Reading initiative.

The role of SLAV

All school libraries and teacher-librarians are committed to progressing work in this area on an individual basis, and to sharing and learning from best practice across schools and school sectors. SLAV will initiate, support and monitor progress in relation to these Commitments to Action via its regular meetings, and may agree at its discretion to further joint national work in this area with ASLA/ALIA.

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__Cecilie Murray__ is Director of Delphian eLearning. Delphian eLearning specialises in learning innovation and thought leadership. They are at the forefront of mobile learning research, digital content development and strategic planning for interactive, engaging learning. She can be contacted at Email: cecilie@delphian.com.au.