

A School  
Libraries  
Futures  
Project

# School libraries 21C



Report of the *School libraries 21C* online discussion, commissioned by School Libraries and Information Literacy Unit, Curriculum K–12 Directorate, NSW Department of Education and Training.

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# Background and purpose

As part of the *School Libraries Futures Project*, the moderated discussion blog *School Libraries 21C* was created and hosted by the School Libraries and Information Literacy Unit to gather a diverse range of viewpoints and perspectives on the status and future of school libraries in New South Wales government schools, with a view to identifying directions, challenges, and support for the continuous improvement of the information landscape in NSW government schools. Motivating the establishment of the blog has been the School Libraries and Information Literacy Unit's intent to provide a framework for a process of reflecting on what is best in our school libraries, and setting the agenda for the future.

The online discussion commenced on June 1, 2009, and remained open for input until August 3, 2009. The invitation to participate in the blog was extended by the Director, Curriculum K–12, NSW Department of Education and Training (DET), to regions, principals and schools. An invitation was also distributed nationally and internationally via email, state, national and international mailing lists and blogs, and Twitter, and through international websites such as the *School Library Journal's* blog by Dr Joyce Valenza.

The blog discussion was guided by Lyn Hay, Lecturer, School of Information Studies, Charles Sturt University, NSW, and Dr Ross Todd, Director, Center for International Scholarship in School Libraries (CISSL), School of Communication and Information at Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey, USA. The blog was moderated by Colleen Foley, Leader, School Libraries and Information Literacy Unit, Curriculum K-12 Directorate. Respondents were encouraged to undertake background reading provided through Scan, 'School libraries building capacity for student learning in 21C' (Hay & Foley, 2009). The themes and focus questions for the discussion are shown in Table 1.


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1. The future of school libraries
    - a. Do we need a school library in 21st century schools?
    - b. How, if at all, do current school libraries impact on student learning?
  2. The school library of the future
    - a. What would a school library of the future look like?
    - b. What would be its primary responsibilities and functions to meet the learning goals of schools?
    - c. What would be the essential work of the teacher librarian?
    - d. What would be its key impacts on student learning?
  3. What will it take to get there?
    - a. Identify strategies / initiatives / support at the practitioner level
    - b. Identify strategies / initiatives / support at the school level
    - c. Identify strategies / initiatives / support at the NSW Department of Education level

Table 1 Themes and focus questions

## Participation in the blog

As shown in Table 2, there was considerable participation in the blog, and it gathered a substantial number of sustained responses. These included responses by the two blog facilitators. Submissions were invited from individuals, and groups such as school, team or professional network focus groups posting combined responses to aspects of the discussion. It was pleasing to see that several professional groups in regions across NSW provided collective responses.

Participants were asked to indicate details such as: government / non-government school, position in school, and if a group response, the nature of the group e.g. executive, whole school staff, teacher librarian professional network. The large majority of respondents were teacher librarians, and it might be assumed that they have a vested interest in their roles and their futures, and responses may be linked to the ongoing direction of teacher librarianship in Australia, and the professional position of teacher librarians in schools. The absence of substantive input from people outside of the teacher librarianship profession emerges as a concern. Reasons for this are only speculative: lack of interest in the future of school libraries; do not see the educational value of school libraries; other pressing concerns which have deflected involvement (such as the Digital Education Revolution (DER) – NSW laptop for schools initiative); or not feeling comfortable sharing one’s views on such a public online forum.

Themes and questions		Number of posts
1. Future of school libraries	Total	105
a. Do we need a school library in 21st century schools?		66
b. How, if at all, do current school libraries impact on student learning?		39
2. School library of the future	Total	67
a. What would a school library of the future look like?		32
b. What would be its primary responsibilities & functions to meet the learning goals of schools?		8
c. What would be the essential work of the teacher librarian?		21
d. What would be its key impacts on student learning?		6
3. What it takes to get there	Total	53
a. Identify strategies / initiatives / support at the practitioner level		17
b. Identify strategies / initiatives / support at the school level		12
c. Identify strategies / initiatives / support at the NSW Department of Education level		24
	TOTAL	225

Table 2 Number of blog responses per question

## Analysis of responses

The posts were analysed using qualitative approaches. The purpose was to identify common and pervasive themes and relationships that would provide key insights into the questions posed on the blog. Our approach to analysis was not rigid nor static, but an iterative process of questioning, and a detailed constant comparison and open coding to establish dominant concepts and themes, and then axial coding to establish relationships and patterns. Both blog facilitators did analysis and coding independently and then discussed initial schema to formulate a common analytical response to establish dependability and credibility of data analysis.

The majority of this report presents findings and commentary based on blog responses, followed by a set of key recommendations which are proposed to provide individuals, school communities, and the system with a way forward in envisioning the future for school libraries within the NSW Department of Education and Training. The commentary draws heavily on statements made by respondents in order to establish the evidence base for claims made.

# Findings and commentary

## 1. The future of school libraries

### The school library is an important part of school life

Respondents were asked to present a case for school libraries in 21st century schools, and to support claims made with argument and evidence. Sixty six postings addressed this question (1A). Consent for school libraries came from within the teacher librarianship community, with little response from outside of this professional group. The clear strong response was that yes, school libraries are needed – emphatically so. There was also recognition that school libraries were increasingly important, particularly, *as both students and staff try to keep pace with rapid developments in technology and the ways in which information is accessed, shared and communicated* (1A.43). Its central role in the culture, learning and ecology of the school was also identified: for example, *Libraries in schools are like a huge tree in a vast paddock - in that they have their own ecosystem. Pull that tree out and what happens to the life that relied on it* (1A.5)?

The posts provided a cogent set of reasons why schools need school libraries. These are briefly elaborated here.

School libraries provide a common information grounds for supporting learning across the school and fostering the development of deep knowledge through the provision of accessible resources, and the development of sophisticated information and technology understandings and skills. This information-to-knowledge function was seen as *both archival and educative - provoking higher learning in all who use its tools* (1A.36). Blog responses identified a wide range of information competencies and learning attributes seen as essential for learning in rich information environments, and for developing deep knowledge and understanding. Key competencies identified were:

- *Developing an inquiry process* (1A.21), *enquiry based learning* (1A.39), *Guided Inquiry* (1A.43) and *information processing education* (1A.35) which *nurtures self learning, encourages students to ask questions and to seek help when needed* (1A.42), and provides the intellectual scaffolding for developing knowledge.
- *Developing skills in higher-order thinking, problem-solving, communication and collaboration* (1A.43) to help students *construct knowledge* (1A.23) and to foster *deep knowledge and deep understanding* (1A.43).
- A range of information handling skills, such as *how to efficiently use a library and its catalogue, how to locate the resources they require, how to enjoy literature and how to find more books by an author they enjoy* (1A.24), searching skills such as *using the databases the school subscribes to and how to make best use of myriad information sources* (1A.27) in order to *teach students to be discerning users of information* (1A.37), and *where children are guided to locate, access, analyse, evaluate and then synthesise information, from books or online* (1A.38).
- *Reader education* (1A.35) and *advocating reading* (1A.37) in order for students to be *good readers and develop mastery of literacy skills* (1A.45) and have *passion of reading* (1A.42).
- A range of technology based skills for enabling students to engage in digital information, *guide students through the vast library-in-the-clouds* (1A.28), *how to judge the reliability of a*

*website (students) have found and select information from that site (1A.33), and to lead the school in the embracing of Web 2.0 technology and the use of wikis, blogs, webpages, Moodle, e-books, internet use (1A.33).*

The burgeoning growth of digital information and the emergence of participatory and collaborative web environments were further presented as arguments for the provision and maintenance of school libraries. As one participant argued:

*... students certainly are comfortable with computers, but that's not the same as saying that they're comfortable reading and absorbing long works on a screen. ... Because we want students to move from simple information access skills to knowledge development and application to understanding to wisdom, technology that fosters short attention spans is both dangerous and counterproductive. ... If the higher levels of knowledge and understanding are going to be grasped, they require greater attention spans than do the lower levels of data and information... This tends toward a conclusion that libraries are vital to both education and the national intellectual life (1A.18).*

Against this backdrop of the information-to-knowledge journey of students, some respondents spoke of the school library as a *knowledge commons* or a *learning commons* – a common place, a shared space for all students and the community (1A.43). As one high school principal observed:

*21st century school libraries remain the backbone of schools. They are changing - reflecting our world and our values. There will always be the need for resources - books, media, electronic... A critical feature of this will always be the ways in which information processes are taught and dispersed throughout student, teacher and parent world. Crafty teacher librarians who are at the cutting interface of technology will be needed to meet the very much individualised learning needs of clients.*

*When I enter my own school library I see a social network - students and teachers doing all manner of things - everything from reading, promoting, quiet games, social skilling, researching, working on the computers, group planning, the list becomes quite endless. I see a thriving centre of learning - and something that is integral to the way the whole school functions (1A.36).*

The school library is an intellectual space for the development of a wide range of information handling and using competencies that lead to creating deep knowledge and understanding. Everyone within the school community *helps build both a physical and a virtual place we could term an information commons, a learning commons, a knowledge commons where ownership is held in common and construction/collaboration are constants* (1A.17). According to one respondent:

*One major advantage of this 'commons' approach is the marrying (and in many cases, reconciling!) of library/information and technology departments, people, resources and services within an educational institution to better reflect this convergence of information and technology within a digital society (1A.15).*

This conception of the school library as a knowledge commons concept gave emphasis to the library as an intellectual agency for developing deep knowledge and understanding, rather than that of information collection. However, respondents often lamented that others in the school did not see it this way or perceive this to be its potential, for example:

*The issue for school libraries is that (at least in the public system) there has been too much emphasis on integrating ICT into learning and nothing on information skills. When was the*

*last time in the NSW public school system a professional development course was run for classroom teachers, head teachers and principals on the role of the library and the teacher-librarian? (1A.5)*

*As for school libraries though, as you note, they are certainly under threat. I believe the answer is straight forward - many school communities have simply failed to become information literate school communities. From my very limited experience, based in Wellington, NZ, communities that are reasonably information literate value the place of the school library within the school community and actually raise funding to ensure the library is staffed by a qualified teacher librarian (1A.50).*

## Pedagogical fusion and digital citizenship

The concept of *pedagogical fusion* aligned with information literacy development emerged as an argument for school libraries. The notion of pedagogical fusion centres on the school library providing a common place across the school for investigating and experimenting with information, examining multiple perspectives in an environment where students are guided by professionals and given appropriate instruction to effectively utilise information and the most appropriate technology tools to support student achievement. As such, it is conceived as a unique learning environment—common, central, flexible, open, providing the opportunity for teams engaging in pedagogical experimentation to access and use information and web tools to empower learning through creativity, discovery, inquiry, cooperation, and collaboration:

*It is the place where they are asked to consider information from many sources, question that information and then apply it to the problem at hand (1A.8).*

The school library was seen to play a central and important role in bringing together and enabling the intersection of virtual and physical resources, and virtual and physical spaces—providing that common ground to support the development of students’ information-to-knowledge competencies in ethical and safe ways. The school library, with access to information technology to support both information seeking, as well as the tools for engaging with found information to build deep knowledge, was seen as a critical landscape to foster students’ appropriate and ethical engagement with diverse information sources, and to be critical and safe users of this. Accordingly, the school library becomes an important zone of intervention and socialisation processes for learning how to function effectively in the complex informational and technological world beyond school.

Balance and equity were critical concepts in arguments for school libraries. School libraries have the opportunity to provide not just a balanced collection that can serve the needs of the whole school community, both in print and in digital form: *a balance for students to access both written and digital resources (1A.43)*, but also to *cater for the needs of all these groups, especially those special needs group (1A.41)* and to provide *equity of access for school community to information, resources, equipment, space (for whole class and/or small group teaching and learning) and ICT (1A.43)*. Perhaps more importantly, this provides for a common, equitable and stable access to all, regardless of socio-economic status, and regardless of access to information technologies out of school. As one respondent explained:

*Socio-economic and educational inequity can best be addressed when the society embraces the concept of library in a school being a place which is staffed to provide the dual services of a teacher and a resource guide / librarian (1A.27).*

It was viewed that *Equity is of particular importance in times of economic uncertainty when there may be no resources at home (1A.27)* because the school library may well be the only place where students of particular socio-economic and cultural backgrounds have access to emerging technologies and resources (1A.47). One teacher librarian commented:

*Our society have families who may not have the resources, knowledge or capacity to promote high quality reading and learning opportunities for their children. A school library has the facility to provide this gift (1B.24).*

For some respondents, this argument was even stronger in the context of the digital information environment:

*The very needy have opportunities to access resources they will never have at home ... idea of equity (1A.31)*

*Copyright restrictions mean that free access to everything produced probably will never come to the Internet. Libraries, on the other hand, freely make copyrighted material available in their print resources and can make copyrighted electronic materials available through their digital collections and database subscriptions (1A.18).*

It was clear that access to a quality school library removes barriers and constraints to learning with information technology, system, network, and time barriers. School libraries were viewed as being able to transcend all of the constraints of normal schoolings, scheduling barriers, and provide a multi-functional *learning space, a recreational area and a non-playground place for students to work or read or quietly associate in during recess and lunch (1A.14).*

A pervasive concept was that of safety. The school library provides a safe place, *a safe haven for students (recess/lunch/before school/after school) (1A.43)* for learning to work with diverse and conflicting sources available through the internet, as well as a place for the investigation of controversial and conflicting topics in safety. According to respondents: *The library presents a real, yet safe environment to explore the expanse of information available (1A.8); have fun, feel safe and enjoy literature (1A.10); and Some students need the space as a "refuge" and others come into the space because they "need to be needed" while others get the opportunity to develop leadership skills through years of mentoring and helping others in the library (1A.9).*

## Repositioning the school library as a flexible and dynamic learning space

School libraries were perceived to play a central role in education as a social construct: *a social network - students and teachers doing all manner of things - everything from reading, promoting, quiet games, social skilling, researching, working on the computers, group planning (1A.36); a pivotal role in socialisation of the whole school community- whether for the solo reader, group research or rowdy and stimulating discussion and debate (1A.47); and which, for the students, help shape the attitudes, abilities and interests of people as they move from being ego-centric little critters to hopefully beings capable of thinking and caring outside their own square (1A.48).*

Consistent with this idea, the arguments were presented that the school library as a common learning space needs to be flexible, fluid, even providing opportunities for students and teachers to create their own learning space—customisable learning spaces—where there is immediate access to furniture, technology, information, facilities and expertise. There were calls for recognition that school libraries need to be less formal and less fixed places, and redeveloped and repositioned as intellectual spaces not constrained by time, place and hard copy resources.

While there was a sense that it was blatantly obvious ... that libraries will continue into the 21st, 22nd, 23rd, etc centuries (1A.23), there was a recognition that school libraries as physical entities must change in accordance with educational and informational developments:

*... web searching is 24/7 and anywhere with an internet connection. We have to reconstruct access to knowledge and professional expertise in this 21st century www paradigm. And this means must embrace a new service delivery model (1A.6).*

This includes ideas that *libraries are extending beyond the walls of traditional buildings (1A.36), and need to be a virtual space and the need for a physical area to house resources (1A.14).*

School libraries are also a part of an evolutionary process of change and development, as the information landscape changes, *But I think I am ready for any future library to have a different size, shape, location (partly in holographic or even cyber space?) or collection (1A.34).* Some participants saw that there would be a major shift in focus, *to a focus on learning action, rather than information provision (1A.25).*

The discussion on the future of school libraries generated some thoughtful questions:

- How do we educate staff and schools to use libraries and teacher librarians effectively (1A.5)?
- Are we fighting a losing battle trying to squeeze the Internet and online resources into traditional library tools such as a catalog (1A.14)?
- Do we need to spend vast amounts of money on non-fiction books anymore (1A.14)?
- The real question is not 'Do we need libraries?' but is rather, 'Does our culture need libraries?' (1A.18).
- If you reinvented [the school library] from the customer's point of view, what would happen in your school (1A.17)?

### **The challenge: articulating how school libraries impact on student learning**

Given that the majority of the responses were from teacher librarians, it might be expected that they were in a strong position to present evidence of the impact of school library initiatives on student learning. The opening remarks to this theme in the blog put some focus on the body of research providing evidence of the impact of school libraries on student learning, such as *School Libraries Work!* (3rd ed, 2008). In addition, respondents were explicitly encouraged to provide local evidence of how their school library supports student learning and how the work of the teacher librarian is central to student achievement.

Two key interpretations of the question were presented. The first interpretation centred on specifying actions which are assumed to lead to student learning impacts (which were not specified). The assumption is that actions and processes undertaken automatically imply positive learning outcomes, and accordingly, there was little attempt to state the actual outcomes, or to document how the impacts based on actions were measured. There was clearly the implicit assumption that by virtue of actions, outcomes happen, and that these are positive, immediately visible and known. The majority of responses took this stance: *... often outcomes and impacts are 'assumed some how to be lurking in there' (1B.30).*

The second interpretation of the question focused on identifying actual outcomes and impacts of school library actions. Overall this was weakly addressed, with little attempt to make explicit and measure the relationship between inputs, actions and student outcomes. There was little

evidence beyond unsystematic and anecdotal accounts of the impacts and benefits in terms of student learning. Respondents by and large responded with an implicit belief that good things just happen by virtue of actions, and that through these actions there is a positive relationship between a quality library program and student achievement:

*As with all teaching and learning experiences a quality program enhances student outcomes. Quality library programs develop quality literacy skills. A well resourced library gives equity to students (1B.24).*

At the heart of this program is meaningful interaction and connection with individuals, resources learning, and aspects of technology (1B.31). Respondents often stated that school libraries had a definite impact on student learning, even though in most cases the specifics of this relationship were not articulated:

*A teacher librarian can make a great difference to student learning, especially if they develop relevant online resources to support students based on the specific needs and abilities of their own community of students (1B.22).*

This raises a fundamental concern about the invisibility of outcomes, and perhaps contributes to a wider educational perspective that school libraries do not contribute significantly to student learning outcomes.

### Moving from teacher librarian 'actions' to student outcomes

Considerable attention was given to specifying the actions undertaken by teacher librarians presumed to generate learning outcomes, and these encompassed a wide range of instructional and service initiatives. One respondent summed these up cogently:

*Libraries impact on Student learning by: 1. Promote a love of literature and learning. 2. Provides a calm place for undertaking research. 3. Provides a cross over between technology and print. 4. Promotes independent research. 5. They can be a place of belonging and a refuge. 6. They back up and support classroom teaching (1B.37).*

A number of other factors are outlined below.

### The expertise of teacher librarians

There was a strong view that the professional expertise of qualified teacher librarians were central to enabling the actions. They have *a unique knowledge of curriculum needs and a broad knowledge of the resources available (1B.23), and provide quality control of research skills, they also reinforce the concepts of copyright, plagiarism, authenticity of information, reliability of sources and the moral and legal issues involved in research (1B.23).*

### Information literacy instruction is a central action

Respondents believed that developing a range of information- and technology-based competencies and understandings in students to be *the central action of the teacher librarian in supporting student achievement. Specific competencies included: teaching mind mapping, narrowing or expanding keywords, searching the catalog, how to work the Dewey decimal system, note taking, setting up Delicious accounts, better search engine use, bibliography writing, online databases, using an index, teaching about the hidden web, search techniques, refining focus questions (1B.12); credibility of sources and analysis of information - what to look for when making such a judgment (1B.18); and key competencies of collecting, analysing and organising information,*

*communicating ideas and information, planning and organising activities and working with others and in teams (1B.15).*

The most pervasive rationale for, and implied outcomes of the development of these skills, was summed up by one teacher librarian:

*The skills needed to be able to effectively use and evaluate information need to be highly developed. Students are very often good users of technology. They are not afraid to explore its possibilities. They are however, not always proficient at being able to evaluate information. Often their searching is superficial and focused on finding an answer rather than developing an understanding of the issue. Not all students have high levels of literacy. For many reading and making sense of information is a daily struggle. School libraries offer the staff, assistance and flexibility to be able to support the range of student abilities and stages of learning (1B.28).*

Such skills were also seen to contribute to building generic thinking scaffolds (1B.18). Developing information literacy competencies were also part of future actions:

*Next year the library will be spear heading the drive to evolve our school into an information literate school ... This will have a huge impact on student learning as we work through this process (1B.12).*

### Resource provision

Provision of quality resources was also viewed as a central action leading to student achievement. This includes both providing a diverse range of resources, as well as input on how to use them: *The Library also resource the units of inquiry, and offer suggestions on the use of resources (1B.12).* Resource provision includes internet sources: *Often times, the teacher-librarian will develop a list of useful websites to assist the students in their research (1B.19);* and providing access to resources outside of the school: *The teacher-librarian also accesses information/materials from other sources to assist students and also services a homework centre on selected afternoons (1B.19), as well as providing resources that are not available at home (1B.22).* The provision of resources is also tailored to students with different learning styles and learning needs (1B.23) and for special needs groups like GATS or STL students at point of need (1B.23).

### Working collaboratively with teaching staff

Respondents identified collaborative actions as a key input leading to student outcomes:

*Collaborations between the teacher and the teacher librarian have a positive impact on student learning. In a large school like KHS, teacher / teacher librarian collaborations give students access to the TLS expertise in information literacy and the teacher's expertise in subject content. Together they are able to provide quality learning experiences (1B.20).*

Such collaborations are seen to enable students to develop as researchers, *often the teacher-librarian work[s] in a team teaching model when introducing the assignment and assisting kids in their research (1B.19).*

### Personal interactions

The respondents acknowledge that personal interactions and interventions underpin actions that lead to student outcomes: *it is the little interactions which we have everyday with students and staff, ... that have the biggest impact on the teaching and learning that takes place in the library (1B.13); I help students out during lunch times and before school (1B.4); I helped to control the*

masses that descend on the library during break times - they learn there is an appropriate behaviour required (1B.12); and One-one assistance is always available (1B.19).

### Reading initiatives

Respondents identified a range of actions that centred on fostering a reading culture in the school: *I help children find their favourite reading, I order the books on the wish list they want to read, I help them to choose new authors* (1B.12); and *actively emphasise the value of recreational reading for both the self esteem and learning potential of students* (1B.16). One principal commented:

*Our school has a 20min silent reading program each day and teachers are great about ensuring that all students have suitable reading material. Most of this is provided by our school library. All students are borrowers and students are assisted by library staff to select relevant material* (1B.14).

Such actions underpinned a belief that *increased recreational reading improves students learning* (1B.23).

### Approaches to evidence collection and outcomes

Given the focus on evidence rather than outcomes, there was only limited identification of approaches to measuring and collecting evidence of student outcomes as a result of library interventions and services. These included: *question, survey, interview, reflect on what we see happening in the classroom. We need to ensure as tls we are using criteria to assess our students learning and keep these records just as 'normal' teachers do* (1B.27), as well as using valid, *measurable, pre- and post- tests* (1B.30), and a range of library use statistics such as *OASIS Library borrowing statistics* (1B.30), and *statistics to see how my library is running* (1B.26).

In the main, however, claims of outcomes appear to be based on personal experience, intuition, unstructured observations and anecdotes, and informal approaches, rather than systematically gathered, empirical evidence.

Comments included

*Teacher librarians know what we can offer our whole school community and the impact we can have on all aspects of student and staff learning - from info lit, web 2.0, professional development, visual literacy, inquiry based learning, selecting relevant resources / books it goes on and on. In terms of building evidence perhaps as networks, if you are lucky enough to have them* (1B.27).

*I have seen the impacts that the library has on many levels within the school towards students learning* (1B.38).

*I know that I make an impact on student learning every time I interact with a student and staff member in and out of the library - however small* (1B.12).

*Personally, I cannot provide 'hard' evidence as is being asked (where's the time) but anecdotally I can assure you when a student is shown a research procedure that helps them find THE piece of information they require and the 'aha moment' arrives re how to research and where then, quite clearly, learning has taken place* (1B.33).

*I can see the impact that a school library with a trained, pro-active teacher librarian has on school learning* (1B.22).

*I have seen how students curiosity for the internet has lead them to new websites or information that conflicts aspects of their previous knowledge (1B.38).*

Overall there was weak elucidation of specific outcomes as a result of the school library program. Typically, these centred around claims related to mastery of information literacy competencies to develop knowledge, and reading enrichment, without any evidence to back up the claims: *One of the most important impacts school libraries currently have on school learning is that of supporting teachers and students in their use of information to create understandings and knowledge in order to achieve a range of learning outcomes (1B.28).* A strong example is the following:

*Although I have not conducted research into this question I'm going to bravely claim the following. Students become better problem solvers through engaging with information problems. Students gain confidence and independence at dealing with text, new ideas and information sources, complex tasks. Students learn to cooperate with others to find answers to research questions, tackle multi dimensional tasks, present findings to others. Students become excited about inquiring and knowledge. Students become skilled at using technologies purposefully. Students become better readers through regular encouragement and real support of leisure reading. Students become more engaged with school through the student-centred nature of a library with inquiry-based programs. Students learn to think critically by engaging with knowledge from many sources. Students learn that their interests and abilities are catered for in a safe environment so are willing to take risks. Students develop independence exploring knowledge, finding answers and learn to use resources that best meet the needs of the problems. Students grow from having regular contact with another teacher who cares about their interests and work needs (1B.21).*

There was some limited documenting of specific empirical evidence. One school principal said in relation to reading outcomes: *Our school has a 20min silent reading program each day ... Since its inception, reading scores at national test instruments have usually been at or above state average (1B.19).* Several teacher librarians reported using library surveys to gather data, for example:

*Every two years a library user attitude survey is run, and then statistically collated to then provide support for major changes to planning in the library. ... Last survey ... 500 completed surveys from students, teachers and some parents... showed over 80% gave a high level of satisfaction with their information literacy outcomes. ... Conclusion: What is all this showing me? That the library is a well-used, well-loved place in the school ... the hub of the school learning culture (1B.26).*

However, the outcomes relate to perceptions of library and effectiveness of library services, rather than direct claims about learning outcomes, for example: *The teachers who collaborate in this way have developed an awareness of how library work can improve outcomes for students and how the work in the library plays a role in this (1B.34).*

## Enablers

A considerable number of respondents identified enablers and barriers to collecting and documenting evidence of learning outcomes. The following enablers, with examples, were identified:

- **Library personnel** – arguments were made that school libraries can only have an impact on teaching and learning if they are staffed by qualified teacher librarians and trained support staff (1B.23).

- **Support of executive** – principals were viewed as both enablers and inhibitors in terms of the vision for the school library and support for the instructional role of the teacher librarian as a teaching partner with classroom teachers, for example, *The impact of the school library on learning can be as large or small as the executive of the school want it to be* (1B.12).
- **Library structures** – such as fixed versus flexible timetabling of the school library as a facility, the teacher librarian as an information specialist and team teacher versus teaching load to provide teacher release, and the opening hours of the school library (particularly in terms of before and after school), for example, ... I am on a fully flexible schedule, that is protected by the executive (1B.12).
- **Collaborations with teaching faculty** – this point follows on from those above and identifies the need for an inclusive culture that supports teacher librarians as teaching partners and allows them to be *part of team meetings where discussions of the curriculum are made and enacted is essential* (1B.18).
- **Advocacy** – was also seen as an enabler, and requires the teacher librarian to work strategically with key stakeholders within the school community. However, advocacy needs to be informed by evidence, as one respondent stated: *We can blow a lot of hot air their way, sure, and write lots of letters and blog entries... but it is solid action research that is going to provide the evidence for change* (2A.28).

### Inhibitors

More prevalent in the responses was the identification of barriers or hindrances to the collection of evidence. These revolved around lack of action of others particularly school executives, systems, context, structures, management, and staffing, all of which seemed to work against collection of evidence. Respondents who identified barriers did not seem to see that evidence begins with their actions. Rather, they appeared to be waiting for barriers to be resolved before evidence could be gathered. Major barriers to collecting and establishing evidence included:

- **Time** – where teachers were too busy to collaborate with the teacher librarian, for example, *there are still many others that simply won't/can't make the time to plan with me so that we can work towards common outcomes* (1B.9); lack of support staff to relieve the teacher librarian from library technician duties; and / or being timetabled to supervise senior students in the library.
- **Lack of support by school executive** – this was expressed in terms of decisions made in relation to the school library, such as not fostering the instructional role, and seeing the library as ancillary to the learning agenda of a school: *I feel that the lack of support from my colleagues and the department more to blame than my own abilities or self promotion* (1B.4); and *If they have tunnel vision re investing the money, thus time, by not supporting a proper library structure where teacher librarians can actually teach the skills so magnificently outlined by others in this forum then the school will NOT leap forward in increasing student outcomes. ... place the teacher librarians at the front of the curriculum and not as a token addendum* (1B.33).
- **School structures and culture** – in terms of not formally supporting an evidence-based practice approach, for example, *Unless a school has cause to collect measurable data of the students' achieved outcomes ... that all-important post-test, and results analysis, often get lost in the shuffle in the end-of-term mayhem, and that often happens four times a year, of course* (1B.30); or working in a school where the school structures do not support a collaborative culture, for example, *So how do I convince a teacher to give up their NITT time or after school time to PLAN for effective learning ... after that maybe we can work towards gathering evidence!* (9).

Respondents, mostly teacher librarians, appear to have a weak understanding of the relationship between school library inputs and student learning outcomes. In the main, they are unable to identify data collection strategies even at a simplistic level, and unable to make cogent claims about learning outcomes based on any form of systematically collected evidence.

In the latter part of this report we will provide recommendations to assist in addressing some of the above concerns and issues.

## 2. School libraries of the future

### What would a school library of the future look like?

*Imagine an activity and we will make a space for it (2A.5).*

The second set of blog discussion questions invited participants to take part in re-imagining school libraries of the future. Twenty five people took part in this re-imagining process. As a result of this process, a set of principles underpinning 21C school library design as an instructional zone within and beyond the school emerged. These include the school library of the future as:

- A facility which features **fluid library design** that allows for the customisation and personalisation of learning, where space is iterative, agile, transitional, transformational, evolving, and shifting based on the needs of individuals, small groups and whole classes (2A.13; 2A.17). A place where students and teachers have the ability to create and own their own individual and collaborative learning space(s) (2A.3; 2A.5; 2A.10); and *The way space is utilised very much determines what will be achievable in terms of student learning* (2A.13). This flexibility of design and use will assist in *future proofing* the facility (2A.12; 2A.23).
- A **blended learning environment** which harnesses the potential of physical learning spaces and digital learning spaces to best meet the needs of students, teachers and parents, both in school, at home or by mobile connectivity (2A.5; 2A.11; 2A.13; 2A.22). Collaborations between students, teachers, teacher librarians, specialist teachers, are transformed beyond the confines of the school precinct and the traditional *hours of operation*, and while physical accessibility to space may be limited, such an environment can provide intellectual access 24/7 to foster intellectual agency (2A.17; 2A.18; 2A.20; 2A.23).
- A learning centre whose primary focus is on **building capacity for critical engagement**—giving emphasis to thinking creatively, critically and reflectively with information in the process of building knowledge and understanding. It centres on: asking meaningful questions that lead to substantive engagement with and inquiry into real world problems; evaluating the quality of ideas in information sources; constructing and refining own ideas; examining claims and evidence, arguments, points of view and perspectives; interpreting and synthesising ideas and representing them in appropriate ways using oral, written and non-verbal communication skills, including multiple media and technologies (2A.10; 2A.18; 2A.20).
- As a unique learning space, the school library is not just a centre for information access and knowledge production, but also **a centre of learning innovation** where teachers and teacher librarians are involved in creatively designing learning experiences by way of testing, trialling, and experimenting with information and tools to bring about the best knowledge outcomes for students (2A.15; 2A.19). The teacher librarian was identified as a key person in leveraging emerging technologies—trailing, taking risks, modelling and mentoring teachers and students in the use of a range of technologies to support effective information access and knowledge creation (2A.5; 2A.18; 2A.20; 2A.23).
- A learning environment that demonstrates **the power of pedagogical fusion**, where pedagogy underpins the decision making behind a school's information architecture—where technology infrastructure and support services, networked information services and provision of access do not restrict innovative and flexible use of space, resources or expertise. A pedagogical (not technical) agenda leads technology integration and use to support teaching and learning—an

information leadership approach (2A.5; 2A.7; 2A.18). The information services, technology and learning support provided by a school library of the future will transcend physical space and *fuse* not only classrooms, but homes and mobile learners (2A.11; 2A.13; 2A.17; 2A.32).

- A facility consisting of **seamless search interfaces**, with federated searching embracing user tagging (folksonomies) as well as standardised controlled vocabularies to enable intuitive access and support *conversation* with the user as an interactive tool for inquiry and discovery (2A.16); *Libraries should provide the map and highway to get to the destination - rather than provide all of the destinations* (2A.11).
- A facility which seeks a **balance between print and digital collections** and which does not privilege one format over another, consistent with the multi-format nature of our information world (2A.2; 2A.10; 2A.15; 2A.22; 2A.26). At the same time, it is increasingly conscious of the need to redesign and reshape physical spaces to better support teachers and students as digital researchers (2A.4; 2A.11). With shrinking hard copy collections, we need to explore ways to best utilise these spaces for collaborative digital production (2A.3; 2A.5).
- A centre that supports **literary learning**, where students become immersed in imaginary worlds, explore personal reading interests, develop sustained voluntary reading practices, develops reading for meaning and independence as critically-capable readers (2A.2; 2A.11; 2A.19).

The recent Australian Government funding program, *Building the Education Revolution in K–12 Schools* (BER), obviously considers school libraries to be fundamental installations in schools, as reflected in one of the BER priority areas being Primary Schools for the 21st Century, a program that has been allocated \$12.4 billion of federal funding. The need for school libraries is articulated by Julia Gillard (2009) in the following statement:

*The construction of 21st century libraries is the first priority for Primary Schools for the 21st Century, followed by the construction of multipurpose halls, or in the case of smaller schools, covered outdoor learning areas. These buildings will provide students, teachers and the wider school community with access to a range of high quality resources, information and cutting edge tools to support learning and improve the quality and diversity of learning environments.*

A number of respondents referred to the impact of the BER on recent conversations at school, and the need for immediate action regarding building a vision to inform the design of their school's new library facility (2A.20). Respondents shared their stories about recent conversations with regard to developing a vision:

*Ultimately what this education system (along with other states and territories) is trying to do is develop a Vision for Learning for schools for the future. I sensed a significant shift in vision building at the system level and I just hope school communities embrace this invitation and use such forums to help build this new vision.*

*The school library was discussed in terms of 'The Transformation Hub' of a school, and the need for consistent 'branding' of the library as an active, engaging learning space that demonstrates the successful convergence of information, technology and learning. Flexibility of newly designed learning spaces was viewed as essential, as was the need for technology to be seamless and wireless, with less 'fixed' technology within these learning spaces. (2A.17)*

During the online discussion, Todd highlighted the consistency of ideas being presented by respondents in question 2A concerning *the emergence of vast quantities of digital information and how this impacts on the traditional concept of a library with large stores of carefully selected print resources tailored to curriculum needs and to the values which schools seek to develop and inspire* (2A.6). He cited findings from a British Library research report (Rowlands & Nicholas, 2008) identifying some information behaviours of *Google generation* students. These included:

- *Horizontal information seeking: skim view small number of pages then 'bounce' out, often never to return*
- *Spend very little time on e-book and e-journal sites, and databases in school libraries*
- *Engage in 'power browsing': scanning rapidly; rapid and limited assessment and retrieval; clicking extensively*
- *Make use of simple search strategies*
- *Squirreling behaviour: stockpiling content in the form of downloads*
- *School libraries are not the first point of information seeking*
- *Superficial effort in knowledge construction.*

Todd noted:

*These are fairly challenging findings. How do such findings impact on what we think a school library is, and how it might evolve (2A.6)?*

A number of respondents highlighted the core function of the school library of the future as needing to support student development in critically engaging with an increasingly complex world of information, for example:

*From an inquiry, information seeking perspective, many students just want 'the answer' usually via google. What they really need is a range of information rich resources, digital and hard copy, and a mentor to help them on their inquiry journey to ensure its success (2A.10).*

One respondent employed a swimming metaphor to demonstrate her point:

*School libraries will remain the locus of a school's information if they change to meet the new information needs of students. The library is no longer the only location that houses information; information sources are at every student's fingertips. Libraries need to become the leaders in teaching students how to navigate through information sources such as databases, ebooks, blogs, websites, wikis, etc.*

*Students are swimming through a sea of information. Librarians cannot be mere lifeguards, allowing students to swim on their own and responding/helping only when a student is overwhelmed by the sea. Librarians must become swimming instructors. We need to equip students with the necessary skills to swim through the sea and avoid and/or respond to any waves and undercurrents effectively.*

*As students begin their inquiry, the discussion should not be focused solely on how to find information. Libraries need to teach students how to evaluate which sources (books, blogs, tweets, websites, databases, etc.) are most appropriate for their research. Libraries also need to teach students how to take information and use it to create and solve problems. In order for any of the above to take place, students must be given opportunities to learn these crucial skills (2A.18).*

However, this re-imagining of school libraries for the future also raised some concerns for participants in the discussion. These included the need for increased levels of library staffing to support a blended learning environment (2A.8), the demands of an increasingly technology intensive role and the need for teacher librarians and library support staff to continually keep up-to-date with new and emerging technologies (2A.9), and ensuring the school library remains connected with the broader school community:

*It seems to me that our school library webpages, online pathfinders, blogs, wikis, Moodles, etc. –and whatever else is yet to come in the virtual world –are going to be just as important, or more important, as the new BER library buildings (2A.20).*

The desire to see a future where all school libraries are well resourced, with the introduction of guidelines or standards within a system (or even nationally) to ensure a consistent and professional approach to the resourcing of school libraries was also raised as a concern:

*I would like to see our school libraries of the future a place where resources and staffing are followed with a workable formula. One that allows all who access the library to receive professional assistance and a well resourced library. A minimum standard placed to make sure decisions about budgets and staffing do not put the students and staff at a disadvantage (2A.16); and*

*If we are talking about equity, if we are talking about improving literacy and information literacy, if we are talking about authentic, resource-based learning and quality teaching, we must agree that ALL Australian students deserve professional school library services managed by professionally trained teacher librarians (2A.24).*

One message from the discussion was clear—those people in teacher librarian positions need to leverage opportunities for vision building to become empowered as their school's information professional, as illustrated in the comment below:

*What I also find empowering is your statement, 'Imagine an activity and we will make a space for it.' This resonates to me a vision and willingness on behalf of the information professional in a school to be flexible, to be challenged (and thrive on such challenges!), and ultimately, be an information leader (2A.7).*

## Primary responsibilities & functions of a school library of the future

Only six participants attempted to answer this question, which suggests the difficulties faced by the teacher librarian profession in clearly articulating how the school library program can directly contribute to the learning goals of the school (as mentioned previously with regard to question 1B).

From the limited discussion, a number of themes emerged. Firstly, the primary goal of a school library of the future should be to support the intellectual development of children and young people. Todd provided participants with a lens to explore the importance of *intellectual engagement* as a primary responsibility of the school library (2B.2), based on the Canadian Education Association (CEA) (2007) report, entitled *What did you do in school today?: Transforming classrooms through social, academic and intellectual engagement*. He wrote:

*Central to its findings is the importance of developing intellectual engagement, and this revolves around instructional interventions. The study talks about the key dimensions of instructional challenge, characterized by:*

- *Curriculum as discipline*
- *Exploration, understanding of concepts*
- *Development of ideas through the disciplines and through work on authentic problems*
- *Individual and collective knowledge building*
- *Effective learning time*
- *Positive classroom disciplinary climate*
- High expectations for success
- Positive relationships with teachers.

*It also places emphasis on the development of confidence as knowledge-builders, problem-solvers, conceptual thinkers, self-motivated learners, including orientation to original work and often collaboration (2B.2).*

Three participants responded affirmatively with regard to *developing intellectual engagement* as a way of recasting the primary function of a school library of the future. As one respondent stated, *this may well be a good umbrella term for what future school libraries will be able to do best (2B.5)*. One school principal viewed the central tenet of this as supporting the information-to-knowledge journey, *to research and outsource materials needed by clients to enable them to follow their learning journey (2B.3)*, using different types and styles of resources, and helping students understand how meaning is constructed from a variety of sources. This included learning support for teachers as well as students in a uniquely flexible, responsive and inclusive learning space, as articulated by one regional teacher librarian group:

*School Libraries have an integral role within the school to support and facilitate student and staff learning.*

*School Libraries are the ONLY facility in a school where ALL learning goals of every student and teacher of every KLA and school initiative is supported (2B.4).*

Learning in a school library of the future would focus on inquiry, discovery and creativity, where students are challenged to research *widely—via collaboratively-planned, taught and assessed Guided Enquiry activities*. This was seen to be a *most effective way to ensure that students will be able to achieve success, especially if the pool of relevant/available resources is already limited by budget. I like the strategy where the students agree they must use a variety of resource types as they research a topic (2B.5)*.

The foundations of a school library program of the future would be based on understanding the dimensions of authentic learning and authentic research, where learning focuses on both formative and summative assessment, with teachers and teacher librarians working together diagnostically to identify learning dilemmas and plan for instructional interventions at the point of need. Teachers and teacher librarians would be provided with professional development opportunities to learn together to develop instruction that is targeted to support knowledge creation, with a focus on individual and collective knowledge building activities:

*Our school has now had numerous sessions on the 'development of ideas through the disciplines and through work on authentic problems', including an excellent one-day session here with Jamie McKenzie, but I think we'd all agree that finding that little bit of extra planning time, to make lessons more focused on authentic problems is the hardest bit. The school day goes by so fast; not to mention finding more time to assess the work before students move on to create their final product. The more 'authentic problems' become*

*embedded into our syllabuses and teaching strategies, the more things will improve, but for many staff it's a challenging hurdle. The way of the future, but we're not there yet (2B.5).*

It was also suggested that for a school library of the future to meet the above responsibilities, the school and/or system would recognise that planning and development time is part of instructional design, not additional to normal practices. Thus, the provision of time was viewed as best practice, that is, making time for teachers and teacher librarians to plan their collaborations would need to be a high priority in a school library of the future. For example:

*Collaboration with staff to set assignments and create proformas to include higher order thinking skills would be encouraged. Utilising the library space for conferencing, book talks, debates etc would enhance the library's role as leading in literacy and learning (2B.6).*

Concerns were also raised in this section about how a school library of the future could provide such affordances, if existing funding models were not addressed in some way to allow for open source, cost free access to learning materials rather than having quality resources *locked in* high cost subscription data bases (2B.1; 2B.5). These concerns are also addressed in the Recommendations section of this report. It was proposed that school libraries of the future would provide seamless access to, and integration of, a shared network of resources (either within an education system or in collaboration with other state departments or institutions, for example, the NSW state or public library system). Such collaboration supports the building of community, communication, collegiality, and team work across school, regions and/or systems. One respondent alluded to resource sharing initiatives already being trialled within the NSW Department, and the need for the profession to be kept informed about such developments, for example:

*I perceive a move to more schools sharing campus library facilities. I assume studies are being done on the successes of the NSW 'education precincts' already set up. It would be interesting to hear how those experiments are faring. (Did these end up being 'libraries of the future'?) (2B.5).*

## The essential work of the teacher librarian in a school library of the future

Twenty one people responded to this question. The essential work of the teacher librarian was identified in terms of curriculum design, instructional leadership, technology innovation, building and leading teams, and knowledge / facilities manager. However, the breadth of the role of the teacher librarian was acknowledged across school contexts, with school library teams requiring different emphases on particular aspects of the role depending on the nature of the library staffing complement and the specific needs of the school:

*We all have common roles but these need to be adapted to the needs of our individual school community (2C.9).*

There is no one size fits all model, and while this can at times be a blessing in terms of breadth, flexibility and customisation, it can also lead to the demise or erosion of the teacher librarian role within a school.

That said, there was general agreement that the learning goals of a school is the core business of the teacher librarian (rather than information collection and management), as aptly stated by one respondent:

*Learning has to be the centre of what we do. Our role is to blend the priorities of our schools, while acknowledging student differences in the way they learn and to offer pedagogical guidance on how to go about this in our school communities (2C.4).*

## Curriculum design

Teacher librarians in school libraries of the future were identified as curriculum design experts, who would work with teachers to ensure that students can use information effectively for knowledge production. This can be achieved through the development of learning designs that integrate thinking-based outcomes with learning tools and techno-social structures to enable deep learning. A 21C teacher librarian will need to ensure that learning moves beyond a focus on finding information to deep, critical and creative thinking, *focus on the various skills needed for this—information literacy is just one of the skill set—priority needs to be placed on ICT and higher order thinking/critical literacies* (2C.21).

With critical literacy predicted to be a key factor in the Australian Curriculum, the teacher librarian will be a teacher of *Information Literacy and Narrative Structure within the context of syllabus outcomes across all KLAs* (2C.2), and reading for meaning across multiple types of text. Because *reading literacy is a critical dimension of inquiry learning* (2C.15), the work of the teacher librarian will be *focused on collaboration, higher order thinking, and creating physical settings for a range of learning—creating, reflecting, collaborating and more* (2C.12). Furthermore:

*The resulting challenges for us are how to create entry points in teachers' curriculum to integrate these—a very significant challenge when there are many teachers still 'covering content' rather than teaching for understanding. I believe it requires the TL to be very skilled and knowledgeable in curriculum design and pedagogy to be able to have the conversations, and deliver what can be integrated in new higher order thinking task /inquiry design* (2C.12).

Todd's reference to the research report *What did you do in school today?: Transforming classrooms through social, academic and intellectual engagement* (CEA, 2007) argued that *intellectual engagement comes through effective teaching. And effective teaching is characterised by the thoughtful design of learning tasks that have these features:*

- *The tasks require and instil deep thinking.*
- *They immerse the student in disciplinary inquiry.*
- *They are connected to the world outside the classroom.*
- *They have intellectual rigour.*
- *They involve substantive conversation* (2C.5).

This provided a point of reference for participants to revisit the important role the teacher librarian must play in developing authentic learning designs to support deep learning, and consider how the recasting of their role may allow for greater involvement in the curriculum planning and development agenda within their school.

## Instructional leadership

*The TL is also a teacher and as others have mentioned a key role must be a focus on learning and therefore thinking in all its variations. After all that is where the learning is at, isn't it* (2C.14)?

The teacher librarian in a school library of the future will:

- need to employ the discipline of inquiry to guide the design of learning to foster sophisticated thinking and reasoning capabilities—critical, evaluative, analytical, evidential and creative—in students

- integrate authentic learning tasks to support students' knowledge development and creativity, and instigate responsive pedagogical interventions and learning infrastructures that are essential to learning success
- continuously be a *reading advocate and support promotion of same* (2C. 7; 2C.6), providing sustained free voluntary reading for pleasure as a school community activity, and supporting reading for meaning across multiple types of texts—ultimately reading for independent learning (2C.15; 2C. 16). For example:

*I have been coordinating this reading program out of the school library for the past few years and—combined with the annual Premier's Reading Challenge and our regular community reading picnics—we are getting great results (2C.16).*

Using creative, critical, and metacognitive processes to make sense of information, experiences, and ideas; developing understanding, making decisions, shaping actions, constructing knowledge—this is the essential work of the 21C teacher librarian when working with teachers and students. Intellectual curiosity is at the heart of this competency, which is a major challenge for a teacher librarian who aspires to be an instructional leader, as articulated by this teacher librarian:

*I believe that the most vital thinking skills that will best equip our students relate to the ability to think divergently. At present there is still too much focus on finding the information and categorising it. This is really a 'cop out' that has limited intellectual merit and ultimately devalues our worth. We need also to stop obsessing about 'process' and models of investigation and step back and say as a starting point what are the thinking outcomes I want in this task? ...*

*For example, is the thinking analytical in nature whereby we look at data, internalise it and put it into some framework to say what it means or apply it to familiar or unfamiliar contexts?*

*Or is the thinking even more sophisticated and of a critical nature whereby the evaluation of data is the key and a student's ability to pass judgement on it. What type of critical thinking do I want? Is an intuitive response sufficient? Will more evaluative thinking come from looking at things from various perspectives and points-of-view? Or is the form of critical thinking requiring a more rational basis which requires evidence and elements of reasoning to substantiate things?*

*Or ultimately do we aspire to the highest levels of creative thinking which compels our students to generate new ideas or concepts? The most challenging and difficult of all but the one skill that a modern society seems to be increasingly valuing.*

*The blending of these three forms of thinking along with the metacognitive acknowledgement which asks students to say how these types of thinking helped/hindered their learning should be the essence of what we do (2C.4).*

The 21C teacher librarian will also be a provider of professional development for teachers. This can be achieved through either formal professional learning programs, or planning with small discipline or grade level teaching teams, or on a one-to-one basis as part of a collaboratively designed unit of work. It was proposed that this role of the teacher librarian is that of a curriculum analyst / strategist with the skill set to develop learning paths for whatever the teacher or student needs (2C.21).

Ultimately the goal is to:

*Engage students in the teaching, learning and assessing cycle by developing and facilitating activities based on curriculum documents, QTF, IBL, IPS & HOTS. Ensuring that we are*

*meeting the needs of all of our students (and teachers). Ensure that we are at the cutting edge of student learning (2C.18).*

### Technology innovation

Teacher librarians will play an increasingly important role within the school as a technology leader in terms of professional development of staff (2C.6, 2C.7, 2C.13), and providing the technical support to enable development of deep knowledge (2C.1, 2C.6, 2C.9, 2C.21). The teacher librarian will also require expertise in the effective management of digital access, spaces, tools and instruction, (2C.1, 2C.6), the *development of networks, systems* (2C.7, 2C.9), a *conduit for students and e-learning groups* (2C.7), and engaging the school community in developing best opportunities for student learning utilising the digital information landscape and knowledge construction tools, particularly those afforded by Web 2.0 (2C.7, 2C.17). Being an active member of school-based curriculum and technology committees was viewed as contributing to this leadership in technology innovation role:

*The essential work of teacher librarian would be as administrator and facilitator – acting in collaboration with staff. Teacher librarian would be on the Technology and Literacy Committees and take a leadership role in curriculum development and resource management (2C.17).*

### Team building

The teacher librarian of a school library of the future was also identified in terms of their team capabilities—engaging and enabling teams to function, flourish and achieve in information-to-knowledge environments. The following roles of the teacher librarian as a builder of teams emerged throughout responses, including that of:

- Collaborator—supporting team work and fostering effective communication (2C.3).
- Connector—ensuring information, people, tools, and curriculum expectations are brought together to achieve learning goals, *connecting them to the information they want ... to help them make sense of it* (2C.3, 2C.4, 2C.8).
- Manager—of transitions, in terms of providing learning stability in times of change, *relationship building, negotiation skills, interpersonal skills, and awarenesses. This can be learned in the right environment ... which offer the greatest rewards in moving a team forward* (2C.12).
- Motivator—awakening people’s curiosity, encouraging teachers, students and parents to take risks as learners, and *promote self-empowerment* (2C.2).
- Enabler—fostering community, integration, interaction leading to personal growth, *A trusted adult. A sounding board. A friendly greeting. A safe place ... Someone to talk with, to ask for advice, to test out ideas. Someone to whom it's safe to say, 'help?' or 'where?' or 'how?' or 'why?'* (2C.11).
- Leader—of people, information and process, *to lead and guide others through the complex traditional and currently available sources of information* (2C.14).

### Knowledge and facilities manager

Responses also identified the teacher librarian as a manager of the library facility in its many ways, shapes and forms. This was seen to encompass physical spaces, resources and people as

well as an online (or virtual) presence, including school library website, federated catalogue and integrated suite of Web 2.0 tools to provide for flexible information service provision, at school and in the home 24/7.

It was proposed that the teacher librarian's knowledge and skills as an information and resourcing expert will still have currency in a school library of the future. It is just that the breadth of the collection and suite of technology tools to leverage information and resources from the collection will become exponentially greater and increasingly more complex at a faster pace than we now experience. In fact, the value or currency of this expertise may increase as the information landscape expands further, with new and emerging technologies: systemic knowledge of collections and websites (2C.7); library systems & technology should be adequately maintained to allow easy & up-to-date access to resources (2C9); the introduction of new, responsive online services at the point-of-need, and managing information networks for expediency and efficiency of use, as one respondent stated:

Service Provider to clients in response to needs and aspirations ... Resource Administrator in the context of Knowledge Management and Knowledge Creation ... must yield content flexibly for a range of learners and support the goals of the National Curriculum (2C.2).

Empowerment should underpin needs based service provision, where students are provided with the necessary scaffolds and structures to navigate an increasingly complex information landscape (2C.4).

In addition, the teacher librarian as a knowledge manager acknowledges that the school library becomes a centre for organisational learning, where information resources, people's insights, knowledge and experiences are shared as an organisational asset to foster and enable teaching and learning innovation for student success.

### Breadth of the teacher librarian role can differ across school contexts

Examples of comments about the breadth of the teacher librarian's role across a range of contexts are listed below to demonstrate how the role best meets the priorities of the school:

*My role of as a TL also involves a large amount of technical support for students. I manage a senior library ... and offer a great deal of digital services in a very technology based library environment. Many of the student's questions deal with uploading, searching, scanning and printing ... Offering classes in website evaluation and referencing for students, and collaboration projects with faculties ... [while] I believe literature should always be in a library, but this senior space focus is teaching and learning support, and hence my role as a TL is very prescribed ... I am really enjoying it (2C.1).*

*Learning has to be the centre of what we do. Our role is to blend the priorities of our schools, while acknowledging student differences in the way they learn and to offer pedagogical guidance on how to go about this in our school communities ...*

*Our teacher librarians begin all of our learning engagement by considering the 'type of thinking' question first and then go about working out how we can provided guided inquiry support to build these thinking processes (2C.4).*

*As a Literacy Consultant working across a region and in schools K-12, often in remote rural areas, I consider the TL to be the fulcrum of Information Literacy Skills within a school.*

*They often have expertise which is valuable for Staff Professional Learning; particularly when teachers in their early years post training are wrestling with classroom management, content and external task requirements.*

*As laptops for Learning come into Year 9 explicit teaching for teachers and students in accessing the My Library site and learning how to use various reference programs (set up by the TL) will be essential to improve Information Literacy (2C.6).*

*My focus is on informative destinations to support teachers, i.e. digital resources: DVDs and websites. I am developing my digital skills and pedagogy to use with my own classes, enhance library access and to support teachers. The fiction collection is going strong but mostly on popular series rather than challenging fiction. Lots of students still seem to value that imaginative time out in a fiction encounter. The non-fiction is for teacher directed assignment tasks and I am putting less time into this collection ... My focus is on getting teachers involved in and linked into portals and digital information environments (2C.13).*

*I'm happy to report the local success of the 'Holiday Reading is Rad' program, available here for NSW DET schools that are already participants in the Priority Schools Program (PSP).*

*As teacher librarian, I have been coordinating this reading program out of the school library for the past few years and—combined with the annual Premier's Reading Challenge and our regular community reading picnics—we are getting great results.*

*The aim of Holiday Reading is Rad is to maintain PSP students' reading ages over the long Christmas vacation break. Students and their parents must commit to participating in the scheme - in writing. The students receive a reading diary, stimulating reading matter (including magazines and comics) and stationery. The parents receive a free holiday subscription to the newspaper; an excellent idea, since some PSP homes do not have a lot of reading matter passing through them, especially in English.*

*Each year, a higher proportion of our student body enter the program, and a higher proportion of entrants receive certificates of completion the next February (2C.16).*

### People are central to a teacher librarian's daily practice

Underpinning the impact of these roles is teacher librarians' acknowledgement that effectively working with people—teachers and support staff, students and parents—is central to one's modus operandi. The philosophy of one primary teacher librarian succinctly captured the essence of her daily practice:

*Collaboration and communication are the keys to making it all happen and remembering we are a service industry. Those interruptions are our job.*

*Our job is about people and connecting them to the information they want and need, when they need it, and to help them make sense of it.*

*Our job is about people and helping them feel comfortable asking questions.*

*Our job is about people and connecting them with their worlds and helping them to do their jobs.*

*Our job is about people (2C.3).*

This acknowledgement was also supported by one NSW Department teacher librarian who challenged practitioners not to lose sight of the importance of everyday encounters being overshadowed by big picture thinking. In other words, every encounter counts, so make sure it does:

*Being a teacher librarian is very much about being a part of the school's community as a teacher, not isolated but actively integrated. Sometimes you wonder, at the end of a day containing everything from highly thought out lessons to on-the-run solutions, whether that word here or helping hand there, the smile, the interest taken, those little interactions that are always part of a teacher's day, may in fact be the most important part of what you've done that day, for a student or colleague.*

*The ground level daily stuff, the interruptions met with grace, the myriad interactions, all this is part of the essential work of teacher librarians, just as much—and maybe more—as the grand plans. And it can provide a strong, worthy foundation on which those grand plans can grow, whatever the shape of the future may be (2C.11).*

### Key impacts of a future school library on student learning

Only five respondents attempted to answer this question. Again this highlights the difficulties faced by teacher librarians and other stakeholders to conceptualise the relationship between a dynamic school library and tangible, measurable learning outcomes. Those who did respond identified key impacts, such as contributing to student development of reading for comprehension; moving beyond information acquisition to deep critical thinking; moving beyond the superficiality of skills development to deep knowledge development, with the ability to apply new skills and knowledge across discipline areas and grade levels. For example:

*The TL has the skills to assist classroom teachers in honing these skills to a deeper level particularly when students use their skimming and scanning strategies to access written and virtual texts. However, this is not just about finding information but reaching to that deeper level in assessing and critiquing. It can be too easy to flick through books, magazines and websites careering in too many directions. To access the deep knowledge students need to be explicitly taught how to do this efficiently ... Students who have mastered a higher level in their information literacy skills are able to apply these to a range of tasks, content areas and stages (2D.2).*

This was reinforced by the response of one high school principal, who saw the teacher librarian as an expert in critically evaluating information, and one who modelled the capabilities of a lifelong learner, thus the key impact is in *assisting students [and teachers] to gain that same critiquing 'know-how' by embedding such skills across the curriculum and working as an assessment consultant to assist teachers in developing meaningful and 'doable' tasks that can assess student outcomes (2D.3).*

The potential of the teacher librarian to provide a differentiated curriculum which focuses on personalised learning experiences and instructional interventions for individual students at the point-of-need was also identified as a key impact, *To improve critical literacy and integrated learning by catering for individual needs ... To set up facilities for students to learn at their individual pace to reach their potential rather than follow a generic pathway for all students (2D.4).*

The majority of *impacts* were identified as inputs rather than outputs, again demonstrating the lack of clarity in articulating outcomes-based evidence. That said, a number of these inputs highlighted the unique position of the teacher librarian as a specialist teacher, as well as the school library as a unique multi-functional and yet integrated learning environment within a school, for example, *The first impression of the school library for any user is that it be vibrant, welcoming and up-to-date (2D.6).* Such inputs included the provision of self-directed learning, resource accessibility, and utilising technology and Web 2.0 tools; and processes such as learning

design and curriculum integration (2D.3; 2D.5), developing skills in questioning (2D.6), effective information use and ethical information behaviour, mastering inquiry learning, problem solving and independence as a researcher (2D.2; 2D.5; 2D.6), as well as processes of engagement and empowerment:

*... libraries will be equipped with technology appropriate to keeping pace with constant innovation and teacher librarians will be provided with the professional development required to use it effectively. This will allow the potential gulf between technology natives and non-natives to be reduced, and allow teachers to create learning materials which students feel are stimulating and relevant to them (2D.6).*

Only one response (from a group of teacher librarians) identified the implementation of an evidence-based approach where, *impacts on student learning would be measured by survey and evaluation of the library plan on a regular basis (2D.5)*. This again highlights the need to develop a strong evidence base for school libraries, which is addressed in the Recommendations section of this report.

### 3. What will it take to get there?

Question 3 invited participants to submit their ideas and views on what they believe it will take to achieve their vision for school libraries in the future. The focus of this part of the discussion was on supporting continuous improvement and capacity building in NSW government school libraries. Input was gathered at three levels of impact and implementation—the system level, the school level, and the school library practitioner level—in terms of strategies, initiatives and support required to realise the vision.

#### School library practitioner-level action

The dominant theme in terms of practitioner-level actions was that of pro-action. There was a strong sense that the locus of actions must be on what is the core work of the professional teacher librarian: instructional design, pedagogical fusion, active engagement in the teaching and learning process that enables students to learn meaningfully and deeply through information, and charting learning outcomes which demonstrate the relationship between the provision of school library services and student achievement. While advocacy for school libraries at the local level is an important aspect, this advocacy has to be accompanied by demonstrable actions and evidences which give substance and power to advocacy. Advocacy alone without being centred on core work actions and evidences has limited sustainability. Participants identified a range of local actions, and these were categorised in terms of two dimensions.

#### Strategic versus operational actions

Strategic actions centre on working as a strategic operator articulating a clear learning centred vision rather than a library centred vision, building learning networks in the school, and active environmental scanning to identify key research, and trends in technology and education, and being responsive to these.

Operational actions revolve around the core business of teaching and learning: instruction and evidence of learning outcomes, as well as resourcing, personnel, fiscal actions relating to the operation and management of the school library.

One scholar made the following comment: *I have been doing research and development work with school libraries in the UK for 25 years. In my experience one of the things preventing library development to support learning is the difficulties that many school librarians have in thinking and acting strategically rather than operationally* (3A.3). The interconnectedness of strategic and operational actions stood out clearly: operational actions without the visioning, strategic thinking and long term planning were not seen as particularly effective.

Strategic actions start with teacher librarians thinking through key actions which contribute to *raising their profile in the school* (3A.2), *being proactive within the school, and showing leadership* (3A.4), and *being proactive in their leadership role, in order to facilitate change, library improvement and capacity building* (3A.7). It means taking a leadership role, such as modelling and mentoring learning innovation and engaged use of technologies, *running training and development for staff, about technology* (3A.4).

#### Engaging in conversations

The need to engage the school community in conversations about the school library and its contribution to learning was consistently expressed:

*Communicate with everyone—in your library, in the school, the school intranet pages, the principal, other librarians, student blogs, at network meetings, at conferences. One of the biggest problems is the isolation of being the only TL in a school. Opening two-way communication channels can make an amazing difference to this feeling of isolation (3A.9).*

It also involves communicating effectively with the school executive, and having a supportive principal and staff. This communication focuses on taking a solutions orientation, rather than a complaint / problem approach, which flows into operational thinking and actions: *Go to your Principal/supervisor with a ready-made solution to your problem—not just a complaint about the problem. Make it easy for your supervisor to see that there is a way to solve your problem rather than another problem for him/her to solve (3A.2), or try new and different approaches to provide solutions to the student and teacher needs. If they don't work, try something else. Innovation should be an integral part of the library policy to create the vision seen for your library (3A.9).*

Respondents acknowledged that conversations with the school principal are essential, and developing a leadership in learning partnership with the principal should be part of a teacher librarian's vision. Such conversations should provide the basis for operational actions, such as providing time for teacher librarians to focus on learning interventions: *an adequate amount of SASS time, so that teaching resources can be developed, rather than having to do clerical jobs (3A.4); a positive professional working partnership between the Teacher Librarian and Principal; with shared visions and goals for the Library (3A.7);* as well as actions centring on the allocation of appropriate funding for school libraries, *an adequate budget so that the Library can be the hub of the school for all types of resources (3A.4).*

### **Building strategic networks, partnerships and relationships is essential**

Respondents saw the importance of building strategic networks, partnerships and relationships that focus on the core work of the school—teaching and learning. For example, it involves engaging actively in teaching / learning committees in the school. School committee involvement is seen as central to meaningful involvement and leadership of the teacher librarian in achieving pedagogical fusion between learning, information, technology, people and place, for example:

*Join the committees at the school which have an impact on the library (3A.2).*

*TL's should lobby and work with the 'power players' within the school to maintain the profile of the School Library and all that it offers to staff, students and the wider community (3A.5).*

*Ask fundamental questions about values, purpose, roles; and create a vision (3A.3).*

In order to prioritise one's energies, ensure learning outcomes are central to these priorities: *Prioritising is very important -leads to carefully focusing your energy; considering alternatives; not viewing any existing activities/services as sacrosanct (3A.3).* Engaging the school community in conversations about the school library and its contribution to learning is the essential conversation to have: *Plan to gain influence and position (e.g. which meetings? Who to consult? Who to inform? Where to be seen?). Positioning seen as vital; push boundaries; attend crucial meetings even if not invited (3A.3).*

This is seen as vital to building vision, influence, direction, sustained conversations and a committed collaborative culture, and establishing operational actions: *develop and maintain a current Library Program, Policy and Management Plan, in consultation with the principal and other staff (3A.7); and develop a cohesive Library Team (teacher librarian(s), clerical staff, monitors, parent volunteers), each with defined roles and responsibilities, all working towards same goals; teacher librarian can then focus more on teaching rather than Management (3A.7).*

The strategic teacher librarian engages in Horizon scanning and foresight (3A.3). They engage in big picture thinking to build deep understanding of learning and literacy in a rich information and technological landscape, and critically and carefully translating this into operational actions that actually affect change in responsive and proactive ways over time. For example: *work on the managing change timescale of 3-5 years to get results. Understanding how to manage change (3A.3); and collecting evidence to inform the change and development process, Monitor and evaluate impact (plans need constant re-visiting and strategy change if not getting to expected situation) (3A.3).*

Evidence-based practice is not just about focusing on documenting learning outcomes—an operational action. It is about documenting engagement with evidence at the strategic level to inform practice. Strategically and operationally working with evidence is at the heart of effective practice, for example:

*... collect, collate and analyse Evidence Based Practice Data (from students' learning journals, SLIM toolkit surveys, Skinny surveys), in order to determine the relevant interventions needed to improve student learning outcomes (3A.7);*

and

*... get data on what is needed, how the library is being used, how it's working and what the library users want. This is the base on which any plan for the library sits. This then drives the direction for the library which personally reflects the needs of that school, and all of the school community (3A.9).*

Strategic thinking is also about teacher librarians taking control of their own professional learning journey—developing professional networks, tapping into professional associations, attending conferences—again, building conversations around professional practice and learning outcomes:

*Here its important to remain current with trends etc in the profession. This can be as simple as being a member of professional bodies, including the local ones. Getting to know T/Ls in the area & forming a network to assist professional development. Attend conferences/workshops to keep knowledge & skills current. Whatever your thing is, be a member & contribute to Listserv/blogs to keep knowledge current (3A.6);*

and

*... undertake ongoing professional development in order to be at the forefront of new teaching and learning ideas and Web 2 .o technology (eg. attend PD courses, read professional publications, subscribe to TL listservs) (3A.7).*

The advantages were often succinctly stated:

*Having a workable network allows us to broaden our knowledge. It can be easy to work in isolation within our schools & for knowledge/ideas to become insular ... enables us to effectively contribute to our school's needs (3A.6).*

### Effective practice informs policy

Being strategic turns effective practice into policy. One needs to make an impact at formal policy level within the school to make significant change to programs and culture. Policy development is seen as a fundamental part of change management:

*Being strategic means manoeuvring into a position where you are able to embed the effective practices that you have developed within wider assessment policy, curriculum development committees, new teacher induction programmes, and schemes of work—i.e. within the formal structures of the school. Strategic thinking includes consideration of such things as the different levels to operate at—often at the same time; what messages to give and to whom; the principles that will underpin any project you undertake (what you will not compromise on); and alternative roles you might play (3A.3).*

The notion of *strategic interventions* is very important. These need to occur at the operational level to ensure a shift from operational to strategic, and to build a long term cycle of continuous improvement. For example: *I recognise that school libraries are often woefully understaffed and that it is important to act effectively as an operational manager. However in my experience it is the strategic interventions that make a difference over the long term (3A.3); and The main factor that halts this ideal is the issue of staffing. No matter how good you are there has to be a limit to the efficiency of any school library if the time is not available via staffing availability (3A.12).*

Operational actions for continuous improvement include planning with teachers, building collaborative cultures, flexible scheduling, and appropriate budget allocations. For example: *an adequate budget so that the Library can be the hub of the school for all types of resources; ... time to work with teachers, rather than providing RFF as at present; ... time for planning with teachers (3A.4); Providing resources and catering for all learning needs (3A.5); and Flexible scheduling needs to be utilised to maximise student learning outcomes (3A.7).*

## School-level action

Question 3B sought to identify strategies / initiatives / support at the school level that need to be in place to ensure that school libraries and the professional role of the teacher librarian continuously help students learn and achieve. An important starting point certainly rests with the strategic and operational thinking and actions of the teacher librarian, but there was a clear perception in the respondents that teacher librarians cannot work alone in ensuring that the school library contributes richly to student outcomes, and that school wide actions are part of this action.

Overall, in the responses there was some sense that teacher librarians felt hampered, not being able to enact a professional role due to struggles with system-boundedness, which constrains the enactment of the professional role. Examples include:

- principal's conception of the teacher librarian role
- ICT coordinator and teachers not wanting to collaborate in the development of students' information-to-knowledge competencies
- the teacher librarian used for release from face-to-face (RFF), and thereby posing some limits on the instructional collaborative role of the teacher librarian working together with teachers, rather than for teachers
- lack of support staff
- inadequate budget for resources/technologies
- often not being allowed release time to attend professional development during school hours.

The actions identified for the whole school parallel the actions for individual teacher librarians. These include: big picture, whole school thinking; understanding of the teacher librarian role; collaborative culture; budget; collaborative learning interventions and pedagogical fusion;

harnessing technology potential and creating a 24/7 digital library; library technician support; and whole school policy development.

### Big picture, whole school thinking

A school library and its services is a whole school commitment and a whole school investment in students' learning through information: *The knowledge of the T/L can assist the school. The T/L is one of the few teachers in the school to get a wide overview of the student body & needs. The same could be said of classroom teachers. Our knowledge here assist in planning, teaching & professional development of staff* (3B.7). This is underpinned by an understanding of the professional capabilities of teacher librarians, which was often seen as disregarded, misunderstood or misused:

*All too often a T/L is pressured to do other tasks that is not part of their position (RFF & class room teacher) so the ability of the T/L to professionally serve their school is diminished. We can be an easy target to alleviate timetable/classroom issues within the school & this is associated with the continual budget squeeze by the Government* (3B.7);

*Many principals and other staff members may not be aware of the potential scope of the capabilities of a library as a multi-faceted resource in relation to the learning and development of educational programs that research has proven to be beneficial to students* (3B.5).

Some respondents saw the role of the library diminished through inappropriate uses of the library, which cut across access and instruction: *STOP using the library as a defacto hall/meeting room/display area during class times and after hours as it disrupts student learning and class access to the library* (3B.11).

In a similar vein, *Teacher Librarians should not have to be [ICT] technicians* (3B.2), rather they are learning technologists who should be involved in the strategic conversations and policy development regarding technology use in a school. A consistent message in the responses was that *TLs should be used appropriately within a school so the school community benefits from their expertise as an information literacy specialist* (3B.1). And as one teacher librarian lamented, *always use correct title for the T-L in all documents, public communications and not as the 'librarian'* (3B.11). This is symptomatic of a lack of whole school vision and understanding of the teacher librarian role.

### Understanding of the teacher librarian role

Overall, there was a clear call for understanding the specific expectations of the role of a professional teacher librarian and allowing them to undertake this role in the school. For example:

*Schools and their Executive need to have a thorough understanding of the TL role and the impact it can have on student learning* (3B.4);

*Are there sufficient principals in schools that see the need for a library to function in the 21st C in the same way we do? We try valiantly to keep our executive abreast of new approaches to engage the kids, we communicate what is happening in other places but if there is no real belief and understanding of what we are trying to do, then there is no commitment to making it work* (3B.5).

This is operationalised through conversations at many levels across the school (with executive, in committees, and in staff rooms and in classes) around crafting a *shared vision for the library between the Principal, TL and other stakeholders to see the library as a whole school resource centre* (3B.9); *allow T-L to attend & contribute to executive meetings as T-L has wide overview of student learning needs & curricula ... and consult the T-L about any possible changes to the use of the*

library via implementation of new technology (e.g. interactive whiteboards, installation of school file servers), commandeering of discussion rooms etc. (e.g. for storage, staffrooms, file server rooms) as it will affect availability of teaching and learning spaces (3B.11).

Underpinning this is a shared understanding of the professional policy documentation that articulates the role and work of teacher librarians, including policy statements of the Department, the Australian School Library Association and the Australian Library and Information Association, which provide professional standards, for example, *Standards of professional excellence for teacher librarians* (2004).

### Collaborative culture

This is collectively a whole school planning challenge, resource challenge, as well as an instructional challenge—all important aspects of a school working within a collaborative culture to ensure effective and long term capacity building. For example: *There should be a 3 year plan for the library* (3B.4); including *Reasonable expectation of a timeline for change implemented in the library due to the changing needs of a school* (3B.9); ensuring that *teacher librarians are involved in school planning - especially at technology and curriculum level* (3B.3); and actively promoting teacher librarians as *part of the collaborative planning process each term with class teachers to ensure students are engaged in relevant and integrated learning opportunities* (3B.4) through the school library.

This also involves *Support for planning time for teachers/TLs to collaborate on information skills within the curriculum* (3B.9); providing opportunities for them to *attend various meetings such as Faculty or support groups* (3B.6); and indeed, ensuring equitable professional treatment and respect: *TLs need to have the same amount of breaks as teachers. An equitable duty roster has to be in place if the library is to be open before and after school and lunchtime (and it's a good idea that they are!)* (3B.4).

### Budget

Central to this big picture is an understanding of budget implications: *The TL should be involved in the budget decisions. The budget needs to be based on a formula that assures equitable access to resources for all students across schools and communities and not reliant on P&C fundraising* (3B.4); and *the library should [be] properly resourced (administration assistance & technology) & supported financially so the library can respond to the needs of the school* (3B.5).

Respondents also identified budget issues related to technology: *have the school library be top of the list to receive new technology etc as the library is used by whole school and stop giving the library technology cast-offs to use or store* (3B.11); and *Libraries need to be a priority in regards to computer technology infrastructure and hardware. The most current computer technology in the school needs to also be available and used in the school library* (3B.4). The process of cascading older, superseded technologies to the library demonstrates a lack of vision within a school in terms of the role of information technology in the information-to-knowledge cycle, and how students engage with it to build deep knowledge and understanding, in concert with the increasing demands of students for digital production to support their demonstration of learning outcomes.

### Collaborative learning interventions and pedagogical fusion

One of the key actions for the whole school should be centred on the development of customised and collaborative learning interventions to enable the information-to-knowledge journey of students, to be developed systematically and across the whole school, rather than in a haphazard way. For example:

*The TL role must not be limited to providing RFF. The complexity of information literacy today requires the specialist skills of both the TL and the class teacher to fully support students' learning needs and to make the most out of the library experiences for students. A TL in isolation left to do RFF encourages the library program to be an isolated one and one that can easily fail to achieve what it may even be trying to do (3B.4).*

The integration of many parts (pedagogical fusion) was seen as essential to the rich contribution of the school library to learning:

*In order to have a well functioning library in the 21st C, there needs to be all round recognition of and commitment to a library that integrates the latest technology effectively into KLAS, sufficient support time for clerical staff and adequate administration time so that collections can be maintained and advanced appropriately, to meet learning needs and best practice standards (3B.5).*

In a similar vein:

*It can be a difficult journey to keep the library relevant to the school, especially with ongoing changes/developments in technology. However, if we know our school community, the school's plans & our knowledge is current, then we can find our niche & use our skills effectively. We can not be all things to all people (especially in public schools where there is 1 T/L in high schools & part time T/L in most primary schools where RFF is expected) but we can use our individual skills to benefit our school (3B.7).*

### **Harnessing technology potential and creating a 24/7 digital library**

There was a recognition that the information landscape of a school is not confined to the operating hours of a school, nor the physical space of a library. Rather, it embraces a digital and print culture that transcends the boundaries of the school. Constructing this information–technology–learning environment involves whole school planning, budgeting, professional training and pedagogical fusion:

*We need to maintain our use of books for both research and literature at the same time as embracing the use of interactive whiteboards, blogs, wikis etc. that are the way of the world for the young people we teach (3B.5).*

This was sometimes constrained by technology itself: Hardware needs to be upgraded—no more should the library be on the bottom of the 'food chain' for computer roll-outs (3B.2); and have the school library be top of the list to receive new technology etc as the library is used by whole school and stop giving the library technology cast-offs to use or store (3B.11) rather, Libraries need to be a priority in regards to computer technology infrastructure and hardware. The most current computer technology in the school needs to also be available and used in the school library (3B.4).

### **Library technician support**

Some teacher librarians saw that engaging actively in all of these challenges was constrained by the limited amount of time and administrative support provided, especially but not solely in the primary school: *There needs to be adequate and consistent library assistant time allocation so the TL is able to devote time to the larger role. Ideally these people should be trained (3B.4), and provide a library assistant(s) who works in the library full-time regularly and NOT at the discretion of the principal NOR the head clerical person. Provide trained relief library assistant when assistant is absent so that T-L does not provide de facto clerical relief just to keep library operational and can instead teach etc. (3B.11).* Furthermore:

*The time allocated for library management and administrative role by the TL needs to be sufficient and consistent across primary schools. There needs to be time to plan, source resources, evaluate resources, develop the school collection including print and digital resources (3B.4).*

Limitations in terms of time and support impacted on the capacity of the school library to support learning, such as *school library's open hours, including after school ... instructional collaboration of classroom teachers and school librarians (3B.10).*

### Whole school policy development

There was a need for a negotiated whole school policy that ensures that the school library is used effectively and appropriately, and that it *reflects the particular needs of that school (3B.9)*. This is built on a shared understanding of the professional capacity of the teacher librarian, including ongoing professional growth of the teacher librarian informed by appropriate system policies and established professional standards, such as the *ASLA/ALIA Standards of professional excellence for teacher librarians (2004)*, and shared expectations for meaningful use of the library to support students' development of deep knowledge and understanding. Principal support and leadership is critical here, that is, educational leadership based on clear understandings of the school library arena, rather than based on personal and perhaps negative experiences of school libraries. Policy dimensions might include:

*... staffing support in the library; the physical library facility; student access to the library; scheduling of the school library for class uses; school library's open hours, including after school; use of the school library for non-library curriculum activities; instructional collaboration of classroom teachers and school librarians; reading enrichment / literature promotion activities provided through the school library; teaching of information literacy competencies; assigning school librarians to key building committees that impact on student achievement; library budget; library collection development; provision of information technology; integration of information technology with classroom and/or library learning; advocacy support e.g. at school board meetings; moral support; professional evaluation of school librarians; additional funding beyond allocated budget; appropriate professional qualifications of library staff (3B.10).*

Whole school policy development provides the framework for a cycle of continuous improvement and the realisation of strategic intentions, as well as continuing the collaborative culture of the school and instructional partnerships. This will also help alleviate what appears to be a recurring issue in the blog responses:

*Many principals and other staff members may not be aware of the potential scope of the capabilities of a library as a multi-faceted resource in relation to the learning and development of educational programs that research has proven to be beneficial to students (3B.5).*

More importantly, it works to bring quality student learning and learning outcomes to the central agenda of the school and the school library.

### System-level action

Question 3C sought to identify strategies / initiatives / support at the NSW Department of Education level that need to be in place to ensure that school libraries help students learn and achieve. It was clear, at least from respondents' perspectives, that policies and practices in individual schools are shaped by policies and guidelines at the Department level. Eight key

suggestions emerged from the blog responses which respondents see as strategies and initiatives to support capacity building and continuous improvement supported at the Department level.

### Valuing and utilisation of professional expertise of the teacher librarian

At the Department level, the recognition of and respect for professional school library standards need to be explicit, sustained, and communicated to schools in ways that foster action. The explicit valuing needs to be in accord with training and expertise; move beyond downgrading the role as expressed by some respondents and which some claim to be current practice; and in accordance with guidelines set by the professional school library community, and the national library and information professional associations. Respondents proposed: *the system to acknowledge a set of standards to which the library strives for (3C.1); ensure equitable access to learning for our students we need to have skilled, trained TLs in all schools. The difficulty of dual roles (TL & RR or STLA) impacts on the amount of time that TLs in smaller schools have to the huge task at hand (3C.1); and Remove the option of using Teacher Librarians for provision of RFF (3C.4).* In addition:

*The T/L position really needs to be recognised & supported at DET level. There may also be a case for more flexibility but this should not be seen as an excuse to downgrade the profession & employ paraprofessionals (3C.12);*

*As a primary school teacher-librarian (o.6) for the past 16 years I have always known that as long as library lessons are part of the RFF component that our work in collaboration with classroom teachers can only be minimal. The true value of CPPT has been overlooked (3C.17);*

*... if we are to be serious about providing Quality Teaching and Learning in our schools, acknowledging formally the unique position of the TL is urgently required (3C.18).*

### Evaluation of performance

There was some support for the notion of performance evaluations: *This formal evaluation ... would be beneficial. It would guide those TL who are not current in their practice. It would be a strong basis to guide principals who do not value or perceive the need for such standards (3C.3).* This also has implications for the maintenance of up-to-date standards: *The ALIA/ASLA professional standards should be refined with the addition of indicators for performance evaluation (3C.11).*

### Principal training programs

There was support for the notion that the Department work more concertedly to provide principal training programs that explicitly incorporate learning through the school library, in addition to performance evaluation, as a way to support school leaders: *Principals need to be made aware of the benefits and potential of the school library to raise the standards and achievements of their students ... These standards, let it be said, seem to me to be the only professional teaching standards that depend upon principal support for attainment (3C.11).*

### Quality training for library assistants

Respondents presented an argument that if they are to fulfil an instructional leadership role through the school library and engage in collaborative instructional work with teachers, there needs to be in place highly trained library technicians (assistants) who can work to maintain library management functions: *Clerical assistants to have an understanding of how libraries work and an interest in what their job is rather than just making up their hours by being put in the library (recognition of relative training and a priority to employ those with qualifications) (3C.19).*

## Teacher education

Several respondents made reference to the need for teacher education programs and beginning teacher programs to explicitly embed an understanding of the information process, that the importance of the school library needs to be incorporated into teacher training and also when they commence employment, particularly to enhance understandings of how inquiry based learning is enabled through the school library:

*I feel that over recent years that a lot of effort has gone into educating Tls for co-operative teaching but none to classroom teachers and the executive. This could usefully start at the Dip Ed and be reinforced with an expectation of including Tls in programming in subject areas to ensure basic information skills are built into units and assessed (3C.7);*

*I am also concerned at the lack of understanding that student teachers and new teachers (I know this is not all) seem to have about information processing skills (it is in the syllabus) let alone the role of tls. Do universities provide any training at all in regards to this? (3C.8);*

*Understanding of the information process and the importance of the school library needs to be incorporated into teacher training and also into 'beginning teacher' programs when they commence employment. At the minimum, the inclusion of readings for tutorial discussion. Lectures from practitioners would be ideal. Methods of collaborating with Tls to improve student learning outcomes would be included. A collaborative unit with Tls to be incorporated into practicums (3C.11);*

*I also agree that Dip Ed courses should include the role of the T/L, library & benefits of co-operative teaching. I'm not sure any Dip Ed course mentions the library; the information must be assumed to be known by students or not important (3C.14).*

## Equitable access to professional learning

A response from a regional school library group raised concerns by rural teacher librarians that they are missing out on professional development: Recently there was a tl conference in Armidale which provided some excellent key note speakers and workshops that we could attend - however in four years that has been the only rural professional learning targeted at tls in our area. To improve student outcomes, like all other teachers, we need professional learning opportunities, often, targeted towards our needs (3C.8). Respondents also wanted to see stronger leadership in terms of the provision of professional development, as well as permission to attend professional learning and/or network meetings during school hours: *More PD appropriate to TL needs - guided inquiry, incorporating HOTS and QT into teaching & learning, utilising web 2.0 tools. (3C.16).*

## Cost-effective seamless digital environment and information provision

Working within constraints and limitations of individual schools including budget, technology and staff allocations, respondents expressed need for the provision of system wide access to digital resources, information infrastructure, as well as greater digital resource provision such as full-text databases, e-books etc (where the system negotiates and pays for licensing access), for example:

*The new technologies complementing the rollout of the Years 9-12 laptops provide a great window of opportunity for the DET to examine the system wide subscription to some online resources that are currently beyond the budget capability of individual school libraries. Access to these should be by means of links on the student and staff portals (3C.9).*

One respondent argued: The administrative time saved in eliminating processing such subscriptions and removing some resource costs from the local school library may well pay for cost of their uptake (3C.9). Respondents also identified the need for Provision and

support for a webpage for each school library (3C.4), which would be *tied strongly and obviously to the school teaching and learning program. This would include reference to TL professional standards and to a collection management policy supportive of teaching and learning and a school-wide information literacy policy* (3C.11).

Concerns were also expressed in terms of the budget allocations, and for intervention at the Departmental level:

*Standards in resource budget to ensure school libraries receive adequate level with which to purchase resources* (3C.17);

*Like any teacher in the public system it would be a joy to do our job without continually considering how we are going to facilitate learning within resource constraints. To suggest public schools are adequately funded is really a joke. Schools are depending on canteen funds for everyday expenses & financial survival is more difficult every year. However, while any Government can get away with underfunding politically the reality is they will do so* (3C.14).

### Policy specification

Some respondents also called for Departmental policy to be more inclusive and explicit in terms of the contribution the school library can make to the learning goals of a school, for example:

*Inclusion of the role of the school library and teacher librarian in all NSW literacy and ICT policy statements* (3C.11).

That said, respondents also acknowledged the *School libraries 21C* blog discussion hosted by Curriculum K–12 Directorate’s School Libraries and Information Literacy Unit, within the NSW Department of Education and Training, as a way forward in terms of inviting stakeholders to take part in a broader community conversation about vision and capacity building of school libraries for the future:

*This is a small beginning for NSW DET to recognize the importance of quality, well-supported school library services and programs in constructivist, inquiry-based, authentic, quality teaching and learning* (3C.11).

### Conclusion

There is consensus that school libraries are an important part of school life and are needed in 21st century schools, even though their value is at times not clearly understood, and their role in the learning agenda of a school not fully utilised. The burgeoning growth of digital information; unprecedented levels in the production of global information where quality and authority of information is often not contested; and the emergence of participatory and collaborative web environments all provide an even richer case for the necessity of school libraries as a unique learning space to develop the intellectual, social and personal agency of students to learn and live and be productive citizens in a 21st century world.

Creating sustainable, flexible and dynamic school libraries as an integral part of the information-to-knowledge journey of students will take considerable innovative, critical and reflective thinking by all stakeholders working together to create shared vision, shared commitment, and shared, sustainable action plans.

# Recommendations

The following recommendations are posited as essential elements in creating sustainable futures for school libraries, and enabling their continuous development as an integral component of the learning agenda of schools.

These recommendations are designed to continue the conversations, at all levels and with all stakeholders. Some revolve around professional development, building mutual understandings of the role of school libraries and the professional work of the teacher librarian, and engaging professional expertise in rich ways. Others revolve around re-imagining school libraries for the future in terms of rethinking and reshaping policy directions, and establishing mechanisms for continuous improvement and creating sustainable futures.

## R1 Strategic positioning through policy and action

All school leaders, as well as teacher librarians, need to actively engage with the policy documents of the NSW Department of Education and Training (DET), the Australian School Library Association and the Australian Library and Information Association, that specify the nature and dimensions of the professional role of teacher librarians; and have a clear understanding of the responsibilities and expectations, and enable this to happen in schools.

We recommend that perceptions of the erosion of the profession with regard to:

- a. respect of the role of the teacher librarian
- b. appropriate utilisation of this role
- c. diminishing supply of professional expertise, budgets and technology

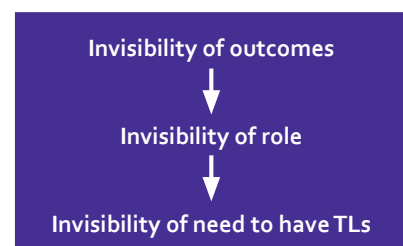
need to be addressed at all levels—by teacher librarians, schools and system.

Teacher librarians need to shift their operation and positioning as victims of circumstance (e.g. inability to take action because of absence of certain features) to a more strategic positioning where they take action, and generate evidence that points to continuous improvement and change of school culture as a result of school library impacts. Note: each of the following recommendations articulate possible school and system responsibilities regarding strategic and operational approaches to addressing this concern.

## R2 Developing capacity as evidence-based practitioners

We recommend that the profession as a whole needs to develop the capacity to articulate needs from research-based evidence and local evidence collected in the school.

While there is a rich and complex body of literature that documents the strong contribution of quality school libraries to learning outcomes, we saw few examples of such evidence, and relatively weak arguments related to why school libraries are needed, and the evidence of their impact on student learning. As the majority of respondents, teacher librarians do not seem to have presented cogent, sustained, evidence-based arguments for the future of school libraries. Guidelines and professional development for the development of evidence-based practices could be provided by the School Libraries and Information Literacy Unit. Such a program could be implemented for school-based principal and teacher librarian teams.



### R3 Sustained evidence-based practice program

We recommend that a sustained evidence-based practice program take place, with an emphasis on school-wide approaches to charting and identifying significant syllabus outcomes, and the skills and understandings required of digital citizenship, as a result of school library initiatives and interventions.

The weakest aspect in terms of contributions was the overall inability of respondents to state claims of learning outcomes at a concrete level (i.e. evidence at the operational level), and particularly claims that identify syllabus outcomes. There is a need for the development and implementation of a sustained evidence-based practice program within NSW DET school libraries.

### R4 Local conversations essential in school library vision building

We recommend that mechanisms are put in place to encourage such conversations between those stakeholders within school communities that have not already found ways to achieve this, or where school libraries are not operating in accordance with professional policies.

Responses suggest the need for more local, school-based conversations on what school libraries of the future might look like. For example, the NSW DET through the School Libraries and Information Literacy Unit might lead in establishing and facilitating regional forums that are inclusive of input from all stakeholders.

### R5 Reconceptualising school libraries as centres of inquiry

The perception of a futuristic school library as *learning commons*, or *learning centre* emerged from the commentary. This centres on a shift in the conceptualisation of the school library as a centre of resource collection and information access, to a centre of inquiry, discovery, creativity, critical engagement and innovative pedagogy. Underpinning the development of the school library as a *learning commons* or centre, is the need for an explicit, holistic research-based pedagogical model of enabling the information-to-knowledge journey of the child. This is the foundation of evidence-based practice, and an essential dimension of evidence based education. Such a model would emphasise inquiry across and within disciplines, deep knowledge and understanding, and the dimensions of the *Quality Teaching* framework. Consistency between NSW DET policy and ASLA-ALIA policy statements on Guided Inquiry and the Curriculum, Information Literacy, Standards of Professional Excellence for Teacher Librarians, and Teacher Librarian Qualifications should be explored.

We recommend school libraries as centres of inquiry be thoughtfully explored at the policy level within the system.

This could be facilitated by the School Libraries and Information Literacy Unit, leading planning and development, and could include the collection of school based exemplars of successful inquiry learning programs that are regularly featured in a publication such as Scan or published on a showcase website. These exemplars can be used as a point of reference for school leaders and teacher librarians to collaboratively negotiate school based policies and practice, including evidence based strategies.

## R6 Pedagogy underpins technology

We recommend that pedagogical fusion becomes part of the school's vision for learning through school libraries.

This presumes school information and technology policies ensure that pedagogy underpins the decision making behind a school's information architecture, where networked information services and provision of internet access enhance innovative and flexible use of space, resources or expertise. This will ensure that pedagogical goals lead technology integration and use, and that the multiple agencies within a school are explicitly acknowledged to support the development of students as digital citizens.

## R7 Information policy and digital citizenship

Underpinning Recommendation 6 is the recognised need for system-level principal and teacher librarian training about the implications and management of technology integration and information policy issues, particularly the challenges facing schools as a result of digital technologies, such as mobile phones, social networking sites etc., and how these facilitate cyberbullying, plagiarism or other unethical information behaviours. School communities need to understand the breadth of digital citizenship issues and devise school based policies to support and address these issues, and identify how learning interventions through the school library can enable whole school progress with these challenges, and play an active role in their solution.

We recommend that a system-based professional learning program be devised to support principal and teacher librarian teams in developing school-based information policies and curriculum initiatives to address these issues.

## R8 Identifying achievement of pedagogical fusion

We are still seeing a picture of the fragmented uptake and integration of technologies in schools. The system needs to enable information and technology convergence (as detailed in Recommendations 6 and 7) by seeking exemplars of schools that have successfully managed this convergence with their school library (thus achieving pedagogical fusion), and use these as models/centres of excellence.

We recommend exemplars of pedagogical fusion be included as part of a School Libraries and Information Literacy Unit hosted showcasing website.

## R9 Effective technology provisioning for school libraries

Our concerns expressed in Recommendations 6, 7 and 8 also support Recommendation 9.

We recommend that school principals ensure school libraries are not marginalised when implementing technology infrastructure.

The marginalisation of some school libraries in terms of technology decision making and provision in schools is of significant concern considering the convergence of the informational and technological in the real world; this is not reflected, nor the reality in some schools! A seamless roll out of technology needs to be effectively managed in schools, and if this is not happening within a school, the system needs to establish mechanisms to respond to such issues and develop and maintain cycles of continuous improvement.

## R10 Re-imagining school libraries program

For those primary schools without BER or other significant funding support, we recommend that school leaders, including teacher librarians instigate a re-imagining process with what they already have: how can they transform a school's library into a flexible, high-tech learning centre? We question what mechanisms exist for implementation at the system level to assist those schools whose library facilities have not been recently upgraded.

We recommend the development of a re-imagining school libraries seed grant program that encourages schools to apply for special seed funding to support the facilitation of a re-imagining process.

In return for this funding, successful school candidates would be required to compile a short report or case notes on the process used and outcomes achieved to be published as part of a showcase website as per Recommendation 8. This will contribute to the development of an evidence based approach at both school-based and system levels.

## R11 Statewide provision of e-subscriptions

At the system level there needs to be an investigation into a state-wide subscription of quality online learning resources (e.g. online reference and full-text databases). This resourcing comes at a significant cost to individual schools.

We recommend that the provision of a suite of online learning resources be negotiated at the state level between the NSW DET and the NSW State Library to provide all NSW DET teachers and students across NSW with access to such a resource pool, at school and in the home.

## R12 Establishing a research program on school libraries and student learning

Notwithstanding the significant research undertaken to date, overall there is a paucity of Australian research on the dynamics and impact of school libraries on student learning. There needs to be a sustained national formal research program examining the relationship between school libraries and student learning, including the documentation of case studies of excellence.

We recommend that the NSW DET take a lead in seeking partners at both state and national levels to attract significant research funding to develop such a program.

Such partners include the Australian Library and Information Association (ALIA), the Australian School Library Association (ASLA), the Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER), Principals Australia, other professional teaching associations, and universities.

## R13 Strengthening principal and teacher librarian partnerships

A significant strategic shift needs to occur in many schools regarding principal and teacher librarian partnerships. A strong body of research espouses the importance of the partnership between the principal and the teacher librarian. This requires significant efforts on the part of individuals to make this relationship work to maximise the potential of the school library's contribution to student achievement. Conversations need to be instigated at the local school level, and collaborative partnerships need to be established at district and state levels between principal and teacher librarian professional associations. The system could provide professional development opportunities for principals and teacher librarians to meet regularly in the form of a joint annual conference or leadership forum with the goal of ongoing continuous improvement and development of school libraries in NSW DET schools.

We recommend that support is provided by NSW DET to enhance principal and teacher librarian partnerships for continuous improvement in school libraries.

## R14 Student enquiry and engagement with critical literacies central to teacher librarian role

We recommend that teacher librarians recast their primary role and function as supporting student inquiry and engagement with critical literacies.

The system should identify those schools who have developed strong inquiry-based programs in collaboration with the teacher librarian, and present these as part of a showcase website as per Recommendations 5, 8 and 10.

## R15 Guiding principles in envisioning school libraries

We recommend the NSW DET conduct an environmental scan of leading school communities who are well on the way to envisioning their school library as a school library of the future.

The School Libraries and Information Literacy Unit could lead this project. These schools could be used as case studies demonstrating strategic and operational processes, and their practice could be used to establish a set of guiding principles to inform a school based envisioning process.

We recommend that a significant professional development program be implemented at the system level to assist teacher librarians in developing the expertise required to effectively function within an increasingly blended learning environment.

Teacher librarians need guidance in bridging the transition from Web 1.0 to Web 2.0 information systems, as well as raising awareness of other new and emerging technologies, and how these enable inquiry learning.

### **R16 Taskforce and whitepaper**

Taking into account the contents of this report, including consideration of the principles underpinning 21C school library design outlined in Section Q2 and the above set of recommendations:

We strongly recommend that the NSW Department of Education and Training form a taskforce to develop a whitepaper on a vision for school libraries in NSW government schools including strategic directions for implementing this vision by 2012.

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