

Research columns

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Scan's regular *Research columns* is refereed by Dr Ross J. Todd. *Research columns* continues to build a value for research as a process, strengthening the theoretical basis for the practice of teacher librarianship. It gives particular emphasis to demonstrating how research can inform practice through the application of findings, questioning of assumptions, and identification and analysis of practical problems.

This issue features the executive summary of the *School libraries 21C* discussion report. This executive summary and the full report are available online at *School Libraries and Information Literacy* <www.curriculumsupport.education.nsw.gov.au/schoollibraries/>.

School libraries 21C: the conversation begins



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This article presents an executive summary of the findings and recommendations published in the *School Libraries 21C* discussion report commissioned by the School Libraries and Information Literacy Unit of the NSW Department of Education and Training in June 2009. The complete report is

available for download via the School Libraries and Information Literacy website <www.curriculumsupport.education.nsw.gov.au/schoollibraries/>. The authors acknowledge the content of this report is not an end in itself. It is just the beginning of a conversation within the NSW DET community involving the envisioning of school libraries of the future for NSW government schools.



We strongly encourage all teacher librarians within their school community to engage with the ideas, issues, concerns and challenges presented in this report, as well as with other challenges that exist within the local school context. The re-engineering of school libraries into flexible, dynamic, high-tech 21C learning centres designed to prepare students to function effectively in an increasingly complex informational and technological world depends on your investment of time, creative and innovative thinking, and carefully considered strategic planning to make this vision for school libraries of the future happen.

Background and purpose

As part of a *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 took place from June 1 to 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*. The blog discussion was guided by Lyn Hay at Charles Sturt University, NSW, and Dr Ross Todd 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.

individuals and school, team and professional network groups. Participants provided details such as: government/non-government school, position in school, and if a group response, the nature of the group. Most 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

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 DER – NSW laptops for schools initiative); or not feeling comfortable sharing one’s views on such a public online forum.

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 discussion blog. Our approach to analysis was based on constant comparison to establish dominant concepts and themes, and then to establish relationships and patterns. Both blog facilitators did analysis and coding independently and then discussed initial schema to formulate a common analytical response and to establish dependability and credibility of data analysis.

The complete report presents findings and commentary based on blog responses, followed by a set of key recommendations which are proposed to provide individuals, school

The themes and focus questions for the discussion were:

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

Table 1 Themes and focus questions

Participation in the blog

Table 2 shows the extent of participation and responses in the blog. Submissions were posted by

teacher librarianship in Australia, and the professional position of teacher librarian in schools. The absence of substantive input from people outside of the teacher librarianship profession

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

Table 2: Number of blog responses per question

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 in the full report draws heavily on statements made by respondents in order to establish the evidence base for claims made. Therefore, we encourage school communities to engage with the ideas, issues, concerns and challenges outlined in the detailed report.

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. 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, some of which is briefly outlined here, but for a full account refer to pages 4 to 8 of the full report.

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.

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, *This tends toward a conclusion that libraries are vital to both education and the national intellectual life* (1A.18). 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.... I see a thriving centre of learning—and something that is integral to the way the whole school functions (1A.36).

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). This conception gives emphasis to the library as an intellectual agency for developing deep knowledge and understanding, rather than that of information collection. 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).

However, respondents often lamented that others in the school did not see it this way or perceive this to be its potential, which is outlined in the full report.

... a common place across the school for investigating and experimenting with information, examining multiple perspectives...

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.

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 process 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. 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. 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).

It was clear that access to a quality school library removes barriers and constraints to learning with information technology, system, network, and time barriers, as well as local constraints such as scheduling barriers.

Repositioning the school library as a flexible and dynamic learning space

This was seen as an essential challenge to enabling school libraries to play a central role in 21st century education. 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, instruction, facilities and expertise. 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).

And as part of this evolutionary process of change and development, some participants saw the need of shift in focus to *a focus on learning action, rather than information provision* (1A.25).

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 discussion 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 impacts student learning and how the work of the teacher librarian is central to student achievement.

Two key interpretations to the question were presented. The first interpretation to the question 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 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).

They 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. This raises a fundamental concern about the invisibility of outcomes, perhaps contributing 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. A number of other factors were identified, including:

- A strong view that the professional expertise of qualified teacher librarians was central to enabling the actions.
- The belief that developing a range of information- and technology-based competencies and understandings in students is *the* central action of the teacher librarian in supporting student achievement.
- The provision of quality resources was also viewed as a central action leading to student achievement.

- Collaborative actions were seen as a key input leading to student outcomes.
- The acknowledgment that personal interactions and interventions underpin actions that lead to student outcomes.
- A range of actions centred on fostering a reading culture within the school.

Approaches to evidence collection and outcomes

The responses provided 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 t/s 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 / or anecdote, and informal approaches, rather than systematically gathered, empirical evidence, for example:

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).

Overall there was weak elucidation of specific outcomes as a result of school library initiatives. Typically these centred around claims related to mastery of information literacy competencies and reading enrichment, without any evidence to back up the claims. There was some limited documenting of specific empirical evidence. One school principal said in relation to reading outcomes:

Our school has a 20 min silent reading program each day ... Since

its inception, reading scores at national test instruments have usually been at or above state average (1B.19).

A range of enablers and barriers to collecting and documenting evidence of learning outcomes were identified. Enablers included: qualified teacher librarians and trained support staff; support of the executive (in particular the principal) in terms of the vision building and support for the instructional role of the teacher librarian; library structures, such as flexible timetabling, not providing teacher release, and operating hours of the school library; a collaborative, inclusive culture that supports the teacher librarian as a teaching partner; and advocacy informed by evidence.

More prevalent in the responses were identifying 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 seem to work against collecting evidence. Respondents in the main appeared to be waiting for barriers to be resolved before evidence could be gathered. Major barriers to collecting and establishing evidence included: lack of time on behalf of teachers to collaborate with the teacher librarian; lack of support staff to relieve the teacher librarian from library technician duties; being timetabled to supervise senior students in the library; lack of principal support; and school structures and culture not formally supporting an evidence-based practice approach. A complete analysis of respondent contributions and commentary can be found on pages 8 to 13 of the full report.

2. School libraries of the future

What would a school library of the future look like?

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. From these responses, we have constructed a set of principles underpinning 21C school library design. These include

- 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.
- 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.
- 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.
- 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.
- 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 facility consisting of *seamless search interfaces* enabling intuitive access which supports 'conversation' with the user as an interactive tool for inquiry and discovery.

- 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.
- A centre that supports *literary learning*, where students become immersed in imaginary worlds, explore personal reading interests, develop sustained voluntary reading practices, develop reading for meaning and independence as critically-capable readers.

Against the backdrop of the recent Australian Government funding program, Building the Education Revolution in K–12 Schools (BER), is Gillard's (2009) statement that:

The construction of 21st century libraries is the first priority for Primary Schools for the 21st Century, followed by the construction of multi-purpose 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 saw the need for immediate action regarding building a vision to inform the design of their school's new library facility.

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, and implementing innovative pedagogy centring on inquiry. However, this re-imagining of school libraries for the future also raised some concerns. These included the need for increased levels of library staffing to support a blended learning environment, 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, 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:

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).

An expanded version of the above, with commentary on what a school library of the future might look like can be found on pages 15 to 18 of the complete report.

Primary responsibilities and functions of a school library of the future

A number of themes emerged in relation to responsibilities and

functions. There was consensus that the primary goal of a school library of the future should be to support the intellectual engagement and development of children and young people, and *developing intellectual engagement* was even proposed 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 student 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.

There was consensus that the foundations of a school library program of the future should 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 engaging Web 2.0 and new/emerging technologies.

It was further suggested that if a school library of the future is 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. 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. These concerns are addressed in the recommendations.

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

The essential work of the teacher librarian was identified in terms of curriculum design centring on resource-based inquiry, instructional leadership, technology innovation, building and leading instructional teams, and knowledge/facilities manager. Each of these is outlined in considerable detail on pages 21-25 of the full report. 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, and specific curriculum requirements:

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

There was general agreement that the learning goals of a school are 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).

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.

Our role is to blend the priorities of our schools ... to offer pedagogical guidance.

Key impacts of a future school library on student learning

The responses to this question (2D) clearly indicated that it is not easy to conceptualise the relationship between a dynamic school library and tangible, measurable learning outcomes. Key impacts that were identified included:

- 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, and
- the ability to apply new skills and knowledge across discipline areas and grade levels.

For example, 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, explained:

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.

The majority of *impacts* were identified as inputs rather than outputs, again demonstrating difficulty in articulating outcomes-based evidence. A number of these inputs, however, 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. Such inputs included: the provision of self-directed learning, resource accessibility, and utilising technology and Web 2.0 tools; processes such as learning design and curriculum integration; developing skills in questioning, effective information use and ethical information behaviour, mastering inquiry learning, problem solving and independence as a researcher; as well as processes of engagement and empowerment. 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 the report.

3. What will it take to get there?

Question 3 invited participants to submit their ideas and views on necessary actions at the system level, the school level, and the school library practitioner level to achieve their vision for school libraries in the future. Input was gathered at these three levels of impact and implementation.

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 inquire and 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: inquiry-centred 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, evidence and long-term planning were not seen as particularly effective.

Engaging in conversations

The need to engage the whole school community in conversations about the school library and its contribution to learning was consistently expressed, in particular, 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 or problem approach, which flows into operational thinking and actions. 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.

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. This is seen as vital to building vision, influence, direction, sustained conversations and a committed collaborative culture, and establishing operational actions.

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 translate this into operational actions that actually affect change in responsive and proactive ways over time, and collect evidence to inform the change and development process.

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.

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:

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. 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. Operational actions for continuous improvement include planning with teachers, building collaborative cultures, flexible scheduling, and appropriate budget allocations.

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 constrain 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. These are explored in detail on pages 31 to 35 of the full report.

System-level action

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 as strategies and initiatives to support capacity building and continuous improvement at the Department level. These included:

- *Valuing and utilisation of professional expertise of the teacher librarian*—this needs to be in

accord with training and expertise; and reflective of guidelines set by the professional school library community, and national library and information professional associations.

- *Evaluation of performance*—there was some support for the notion of performance evaluation to *guide those TLs who are not current in their practice*, and to *guide principals who do not value or perceive the need for such standards* (3C.3).
- *Principal training programs*—were identified by respondents as a way for the Department to work more concerted in ensuring school leaders are *aware of the benefits and potential of the school library to raise the standards and achievements of their students* (3C.11).
- *Quality training for library assistants*—the need for highly trained library technicians (assistants) who can work to maintain library management functions, to ensure the fulfilment of the primary instructional role of the teacher librarian.
- *Teacher education*—and beginning teacher programs need to explicitly embed an understanding of the information process and how inquiry based learning is enabled through the school library.
- *Equitable access to professional learning*—was identified as a concern for regional teacher librarians, and 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.
- *Cost-effective seamless digital information provision*—was identified as a form of system-level support for teacher librarians working within constraints and limitations of individual schools including budget, technology and staff allocations.

- *Policy specification*—for the need to make departmental policies be more inclusive and explicit in terms of the contribution the school library can make to the learning goals of a school, for example, in *all NSW literacy and ICT policy statements* (3C.11).

That said, respondents also acknowledged the *School Libraries 21C* blog discussion 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. They 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), 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.

Invisibility of outcomes



Invisibility of role



Invisibility of need to have TLs

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 *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 State-wide 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), Australian School Library Association (ASLA), 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 white paper

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 white paper on a vision for school libraries in NSW government schools including strategic directions for implementing this vision by 2012. ■

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School Libraries & Information Literacy Unit

The left screenshot shows the 'School Libraries 21C' website. It features a navigation menu with links for 'HOME', '1. FUTURE OF SCHOOL LIBRARIES', '2. SCHOOL LIBRARY OF THE FUTURE', and '3. WHAT IT TAKES TO GET THERE'. Below the menu is a large banner with the text 'School Libraries 21C Hosted by School Libraries & Information Literacy' and 'Envisioning School Libraries'. There is also a search bar with the text 'To search, type and hit enter'. Below the banner is a section for 'Curriculum K-12 Directorate Professional Learning Courses 2010' with a date of 'Tuesday 19 January 2010' and a navigation menu for 'Home', 'Secondary', 'Primary', and 'Across the curriculum*'. The right screenshot shows the 'LIBRARY ENQUIRY' page. It has a search bar with 'Search in My Library' and 'for' followed by a search input field. Below the search bar are sections for 'Browse Library' and 'My Library Links'. The 'Browse Library' section includes links for 'Links4Learning', 'Subjects', 'Names', 'Series', and 'Reading Lists'. The 'My Library Links' section includes links for 'Escape from Knab', 'How to search the WWW', 'Good and Beautiful', and 'Who on earth cares about the environment'. There is also a large graphic that says 'Create Knowledge'.

Connected libraries | partnerships | workshops | COGs resources | L4L | exemplars
 <www.curriculumsupport.education.nsw.gov.au/schoollibraries/>