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Margaret K. Merga  
*Edith Cowan University*

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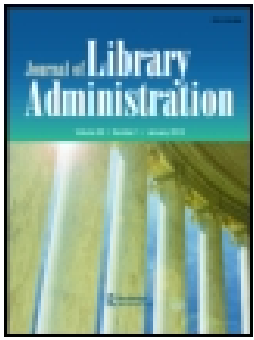
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# School Librarians as Literacy Educators Within a Complex Role

Margaret K. Merga 

Senior Lecturer, School of Education, Edith Cowan University, Perth, Australia

## ABSTRACT

Librarians in schools are expected to play an important role as literacy educators, and have a positive impact on young people's literacy learning. However in the context of their diverse workload, relatively little is known about how this aspect of their role sits within its competing demands, and the exact scope of the literacy educator requirements. Using a hybrid approach to content analysis, this article analyses 40 recent job description documents to identify the nature and prevalence of different aspects of the role, and to explore the literacy educator aspect of this profession. Findings suggest that while the literacy educator aspect is one of the most common role requirements, it sits within a complex workload, and the literacy educator aspect is itself multi-faceted and demanding.

## KEYWORDS

Teacher librarian; school librarian; school library; library workforce; reading engagement; content analysis; literacy educator; librarian workload

## Introduction and literature review

School librarians are commonly expected to enact a literacy support role that may also include literacy instruction (International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA), 2015), and research suggests that qualified school librarians can have a positive impact on students' literacy attainment (Lance & Kachel, 2018). However, recent research has suggested that school librarians may struggle to attend to this aspect of their role due to workload overload and complexity (Merga, 2019a). It has also been contended that while school librarians are often enthusiastic to collaborate with their classroom teacher colleagues in areas such as literacy learning and related reading engagement, there is concern that the teaching community more broadly do not understand what school librarians have to offer in this capacity (Merga, 2019a), and that school librarians may be seen as an unaffordable luxury (Dow et al., 2012).

To this end, through analysis of job description documents for the role of school librarian, this article seeks to make visible how literacy and literature education is situated within the requirements and responsibilities of this professional role. The diversity of the role is explored, as well as how literacy education is positioned in relation to the numerous other work duties that school librarians are expected to achieve. This article

**CONTACT** Margaret K. Merga  [m.merga@ecu.edu.au](mailto:m.merga@ecu.edu.au)  Senior Lecturer, School of Education, Edith Cowan University, 270 Joondalup Dr., Joondalup, Perth, Western Australia 6027, Australia.

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also investigates the scope of the literacy educator aspect of the role that emerges in analysis of these materials, enabling other educators such as classroom teachers and school leadership to understand how school librarians can support students' literacy learning in contemporary schools, and how the complexity of librarians' own workload may act as a barrier to them doing so.

### ***Literacy focus***

Literacy is term that covers an extremely broad array of skills, knowledge and practices, and multiple literacies are used, needed and valued by young people (Alvermann & Moore, 2011). School librarians may support development of many of these diverse literacies. For example, they may “work with students to develop learning goals incorporating information literacy, inquiry and literacy skills” (Australian School Library Association (ASLA), 2014, p. 9). They can play an important role in equipping students with critical literacy in source evaluation and other related aspects of information literacy, and they also often play a role in supporting digital literacy skill acquisition (Lance & Maniotes, 2020).

A comprehensive analysis of how teacher librarians support all kinds of literacy would not be possible to achieve within the limits of a journal article, and this article primarily focusses on a view of literacy that is centrally concerned with the fostering of reading engagement, while not suggesting that other frames of literacy are not valid or valuable, or that this is the only literacy that school librarians support. This article explores how librarians may foster literature engagement and reading for pleasure (Hempel-Jorgensen et al., 2018), which confers benefits as time spent reading is associated with improvement across an array of literacy skills (Mol & Bus, 2011; Samuels & Wu, 2001), and is also positively associated with academic performance in other subject areas (e.g. Sullivan & Brown, 2015). School librarians may play an important role in fostering reading for pleasure, with Cremin and Swann (2017) noting that “working from a commonly expressed purpose—developing students' pleasure in reading—the librarians sought to differentiate the extracurricular reading groups from English, foregrounded reading choice, and created a shared social space for reading and discussing literary texts” (p. 134). Indeed, supporting development of students' abilities and attitudes related reading for pleasure are core aspects of the school librarian role (IFLA, 2015).

### ***Evidence of literacy benefit***

Research suggests that students with access to qualified library staff and robust, well-resourced library programs experience literacy benefit. This is seen in the literacy scores achieved by these students in the United States (US) (Lance & Kachel, 2018; Small et al., 2010) and Australia (Hughes et al., 2013). Number of staff and hours of staffing also matter (Burgin et al., 2003; Lance et al., 1992), with Lonsdale (2003) finding a library program that flourishes as a result of being adequately staffed, funded and resourced can lead to higher student achievement regardless of the socioeconomic

context. As a result, loss of school library staff is expected to have negative impacts on student learning (Dow et al., 2012).

Further research is needed in this field to move beyond correlation and to begin to account for how individual factors related to library staff and resourcing may contribute to student achievement (Steffl-Mabry et al., 2019). Recent research has begun to identify research-supported practices and strategies for fostering literacy learning used by teacher librarians. These could be grouped into the following broader categories.

... strategies that promote access to books; strategies that promote shared discussion and social positioning of books; strategies that show responsiveness to student interests; shared reading; modelling; silent reading and strategies to promote a reading culture; strategies that communicate the importance of and expectations of regular reading; instruction and policy in literacy and literature; and, strategies to identify and support struggling readers. (Merga, 2019a, p. 91)

Further research should explore the extent to which these beneficial practices and strategies form a core component of the librarian role.

### ***School librarians and teacher librarians***

Expected qualifications of school staff vary across nations, and as this article focusses on teacher librarians as a kind of school librarian, it should be noted that these individuals may be particularly qualified to enact an educational role in relation to literacy, as they hold both education and librarianship qualifications. ASLA (2018) defines a teacher librarian as follows.

A teacher librarian holds recognised teaching qualifications and qualifications in librarianship, defined as eligibility for Associate (i.e. professional) membership for the Australian Library and Information Association [ALIA]. Within the broad fields of education and librarianship, teacher librarians are uniquely qualified. This is valuable because curriculum knowledge and pedagogy are combined with library and information management knowledge and skills. (para. 1 & 2)

Though they may not be specifically known by this title (Hughes et al., 2014), dual-qualified teacher librarians are common in Australia, Canada, and the US (Kaplan, 2007), though they may not be common in the UK (Streatfield et al., 2011). However, regardless of title and qualification, school and teacher librarians in Australia, the UK and the US are expected to contribute to the literacy learning of their students (American Association of School Librarians (AASL), 2018; ASLA, 2018; Ofsted, 2006), and therefore the commonalities between these professionals may be stronger than the differences in expectations of the literacy educator dimension of the librarian role across titles and nations.

### ***Research questions***

Given that teacher librarians have described facing numerous barriers in implementation of literacy learning initiatives in their schools (Merga, 2020a), a closer look at the competing demands of the role, and the scope of the literacy educator component within the role is warranted. Through a content analysis of 40 job description documents, this article addresses the following research questions:

1. How is literacy education situated within the requirements and responsibilities of Australian teacher librarians?
2. What is the scope of the literacy educator aspect of the role of Australian teacher librarians?

## Method

Once the research questions were formulated, the method involved gathering the largest possible corpus of current job description documents from those publicly available online. The biggest barrier to this task was the inaccessibility of such documents in many cases once the job advertisement closed. A job description document typically details the requirements and responsibilities of the role, often including specific selection criteria to be addressed by an applicant. In April and May 2020, using the Google search engine, searches were made using the terms “teacher librarian job description” and “teacher librarian position description.”

Documents were deemed eligible for inclusion if they met the following location, currency and content volume criteria:

- They were located in Australia.
- They were dated within the last decade (2010–2020).
- They were at least one page in length.

At around 35 documents, availability became scarce, suggesting that the process was close to reaching saturation around what was publicly available through this method, and therefore when 40 documents were finally collected, the sample was considered sufficient for the purposes of this project, though generalisability is not inferred. There were a total of 160 pages of material across the 40 job description documents, each document ranging from two to nine pages in length, with an average of 4 pages. Documents were given a code (S1-40) so that when reporting on the data, quotes could be associated with the original documents if required for research quality auditing purposes.

Table 1 provides details about the kinds of schools associated with these job descriptions, which is pertinent as the vast majority of available documents were from well-resourced, non-government schools in high socioeconomic contexts and located in major cities. Therefore, the limited homogenous nature of the sample needs to also be taken into account when considering the findings of this project, as it is reasonable to assume that the expected role of the teacher librarian would be at least in part shaped by these contextual and demographic factors.

In some instances, job descriptions mentioned resources that were drawn upon to inform their creation. For example, S24 noted that “the following accountabilities have been formulated to reflect the Australian School Library Association’s (ASLA) Standards of Professional Excellence for Teacher Librarians as well as the International Society for Technology in Education’s (ISTE) Standards for Teachers.” However, this attribution to external resources was atypical.

**Table 1.** Data on schools associated with job descriptions (JD).

Characteristic	In sample ( <i>N</i> = 40)	In sample (%)
<i>Year</i>		
2020	6	15
2019	11	27.5
2018	5	12.5
2017	8	20
2016	4	10
2015	2	5
2014	2	5
2013	1	2.5
2012	1	2.5
<i>Sector</i>		
Non-government	38	95
Government	2	5
<i>Location</i>		
Major cities	36	90
Inner regional	3	7.5
Outer regional	1	2.5
<i>Place</i>		
ACT	3	7.5
NSW	11	27.5
QLD	5	12.5
SA	7	17.5
VIC	11	27.5
WA	3	7.5
<i>ICSEA*</i>		
1200–1300	1	2.5
1100–1200	28	70
1000–1100	9	22.5
900–1000	2	5
<i>Whole school type</i>		
Primary	1	2.5
Secondary	11	27.5
Combined	28	70

\*Index of Community Socio-Educational Advantage (ICSEA) shows the socio-economic status of the school and its immediate context. The average ICSEA is 1000 (ACARA, 2012). It is based on currently available (2019) data collected in May 2020 from MySchools (n.d.).

To explore how literacy education was situated within the requirements and responsibilities of Australian teacher librarians, a content analysis approach was employed (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). Initially using a conventional inductive approach (Kondracki et al., 2002), the different facets of the role and responsibilities of teacher librarians emerged from the data through iterative reading and analysis. Then a summative approach was explored to identify the number of times a role or responsibility featured in the sample, to give readers a sense of the prevalence of that expectation within the sample. Thus the approach to content analysis employed in this article could be deemed a “hybrid approach” which “makes purposeful use of incorporating elements of qualitative and quantitative content analysis for good reason” (White & Marsh, 2006, p. 41). Due to the limitations of the sample size imposed by availability, as previously contended, generalisability cannot be inferred in relation to this quantification of qualitative data, however, this quantification was felt to be desirable in this instance to allow for the emergence of norms within the sample, and to offer possibilities for further research.

**Table 2.** Aspects of the role joint display.

Aspect	Aspect count	Aspect Scope	Text example
Teaching and facilitating learning	40	<i>Plan for teaching. Use a variety of teaching strategies. Teach in library areas (e.g. literature, literacy, information literacy, digital citizenship) and core curriculum areas (e.g. English). Teach both groups and individuals.</i>	Meet and teach students at designated locations and times including relief lessons, study periods and excursions when required. Know and understand a range of learning methodologies and technologies and their application to the classroom. Demonstrate best practice in teaching and learning. (S35)
Collaboration and teamwork	37	<i>Assist staff with resourcing, and plan units of work with colleagues. Incorporate information literacy and literacy skills into units of work. Collaborate to create and resource reading programs. Work as part of a team with other library staff. Model strong collaborative skills for the learning of colleagues.</i>	Partner with teachers to design and implement curriculum which integrates elements of deeper learning, critical thinking and digital literacy characterized by active use of technology. Collaborate with teachers to plan and implement information literacy and literature programs that connect with other curriculum initiatives and result in positive student learning outcomes. (S36)
Collection and resource building and provision	36	<i>Purchase resources and texts for the library that are responsive to teacher and student needs and interests. Review and weed the collection to ensure materials available retain relevance and appeal. Establish plans and processes for the development and resourcing of the library collection over time. Develop resources to create quality learning experiences for students. Encourage all library users to participate in collection development. Provide staff with quality resources to support teaching. Facilitate external access to library resources through development of online library portals and catalogues. Enable effective access to and use of digital resources.</i>	Maintain the collection by identifying new resources and de-selecting old and obsolete resources. Identify and locate new resources to support the curriculum and provide recommendations within budget to the Library Services Coordinator for the acquisition of new resources. (S31)
Literacy education	36	<i>Plan and facilitate contemporary student-centered reading programs. Link literary texts with curriculum units where appropriate. Collaborate with other teaching staff to promote literacy and literature. Provide training and information for staff and parents in reading, literacy and literature. Support teachers to enhance student literacy skills. Develop strategies to foster a love of reading and literature for leisure. Promote a diverse range of text types and themes, from varied cultural perspectives. Conduct book talks, make recommendations and guide students' recreational reading choices. Promote the benefits of regular reading for academic performance. Plan, promote and conduct displays and events to encourage reading. Promote literature to staff. Draw on a range of resources to make informed choices about collection development and publicize and promote new acquisitions. Possess an extensive knowledge of children's literature across</i>	Promote an understanding of the essential relationship between reading ability and academic success. Promote and foster an environment where students are engaged in reading, viewing, listening and creating for understanding and enjoyment. Provide an environment that encourages a habit and love of reading and of sharing children's literature ... (Have) an extensive literature repertoire and knowledge of how to promote and foster reading. (Have) extensive knowledge of children's literacy. (Be) passionate about developing a love of reading in students. (S13)

(continued)



Table 2. Continued.

Aspect	Aspect count	Aspect Scope	Text example
		<i>a breadth of genres. Read junior and young adult fiction acquisitions. Foster and maintain a school culture that promotes reading and literature. Provide an environment conducive to reading. Model reading engagement and enjoyment.</i>	
Support information skills in staff and students	36	<i>Perform background curation of sources for research classes and create research guides. Teach information skills such as search strategies, note taking, referencing and bibliography. Contribute to parent information literacy skills sessions. Teach students critical information literacy skills such as evaluating information and sources. Plan and deliver training and support in inquiry-based learning. Support the delivery of quality online information services. Support the ICT staff with troubleshooting. Promote understanding and compliance around issues of academic integrity and plagiarism, copyright and digital rights management, research ethics and online safety. Develop resources to support information skills in staff and students. Provide dyadic assistance with student searching.</i>	Provide an advanced reference service for staff and students. Design and implement information literacy skills programs across all year levels which enable students to learn and maintain skills necessary to locate, evaluate, record, organize and present data from a variety of resources. Cultivate an environment in which print and digital information is used in an ethical manner. Develop with other teachers interventions to strengthen research and information literacy skills. (S36)
Library and learning environment	34	<i>Create and maintain a library learning environment that is friendly, well-ordered, welcoming, flexible, productive, vibrant, stimulating, inclusive, positive and safe. Provide displays that make the space a showcase for students' learning achievements. Provide a space that accommodates students with diverse needs and interests.</i>	Engage and challenge learners within a supportive, information-rich learning environment. Creating a stimulating and helpful environment for students, including showcasing student learning achievements. Provide and develop flexible learning spaces that accommodate different uses and needs; class presentations, group work, teaching areas, leisure reading. Maintain the Library as a welcoming, dynamic, inclusive and engaging learning environment. (S27)
Communication and interpersonal skills	32	<i>Communicate effectively and professionally with colleagues, students and parents. Establish and maintain effective lines of communication and follow up processes that support the information needs of colleagues, parents and students. Demonstrate a high level of written and verbal communication skills and interpersonal skills.</i>	Ability to communicate in English both verbally and in writing to meet necessary standards with respect to clarity, accuracy and professionalism appropriate to the position. Demonstrate a high level of ability to communicate, consult and negotiate. (S40)
Administration and day-to-day tasks	31	<i>Attend and organize meetings. Create and manage budgets. Be actively involved in committees. Shelf books and perform stocktake. Assist students with borrowing, reservations, and reference and resourcing queries. Support cataloguing, acquisitions, and the building of digital content. Keep accurate and timely records. Assist student printing, photocopying and scanning inquiries. Open and close the library as required.</i>	Undertake required administrative tasks including the organization of meetings and learning teams, program budgeting, resourcing, correspondence, learning area based competitions and enrichment opportunities, allotment consultation, records and back up and supervision of support staff where relevant. (S34)

(continued)

**Table 2.** Continued.

Aspect	Aspect count	Aspect Scope	Text example
Events and displays	31	<i>Create dynamic visual displays in the library. Organize special events and activities that relate to and support student learning. Promote events and displays within the school and community as applicable.</i>	Ensure the provision of displays and special events which support the units being studied by students and the promotion of reading and enjoyment of literature. (S36)
Delegated and unspecified responsibilities	29	<i>Perform unspecified duties at the request of school leadership.</i>	All employees of (the school) recognize and accept that multi-skilling is an essential component of the (School) and all employees may be required from time to time to undertake duties that are outside their position description but within their skill, competency and capability level. (S6)
Curriculum development and knowledge	28	<i>Be actively involved in school based curriculum design, implementation and support. Have strong knowledge of the state/territory curriculum. Remain abreast of curriculum developments. Contribute to curriculum evaluation.</i>	Teaching staff will exhibit an ability to plan and manage the learning process by developing and creating innovative curriculum programs that meet the personal, social, emotional, physical, mental and spiritual needs of their students. (S4)
Professional development of self and others	28	<i>Develop knowledge through professional reading, communication with colleagues and attendance at approved professional development activities. Present at and/or attend conferences. Hold active membership of professional associations. Provide ongoing professional development for staff in areas such as literacy, information literacy and literature. Promote educational developments, disseminate curriculum information and facilitate the incorporation of new ideas. Support the establishment of a vibrant professional learning community. Upgrade formal professional qualifications where required. Maintain professional accreditation with recognized professional associations. Be subject to performance appraisals.</i>	Participate in, and contribute to, training and professional development of staff and students in various facets of library operation. (S1)
Qualifications, memberships and registrations	28	<i>Hold qualifications in teacher librarianship, and be registered to teach. Be eligible for membership of Australian Library and Information Association (ALIA). Hold a current Working with Children Check and First Aid accreditation. Undertake a Police Check. Show evidence of current mandatory reporting training.</i>	(Have) tertiary qualifications in one or more relevant disciplines including post-graduate qualifications in Teacher Librarianship. (Have) eligibility for membership of ALIA and ASLA. Applicants must be registered (or eligible to be registered) with the Queensland College of Teachers. Applicants without teacher registration and who satisfy the educational/professional requirements of the role may be considered. (S22)
Support the school ethos	28	<i>Perform formal and informal pastoral care roles as required. Support the religious ideology of the school. Participate in religious rituals, retreats and spirituality programs. Support students' spiritual and personal development.</i>	Nurture the spiritual and personal development of the students in your care by encouraging positive, caring relationships, a sense of wonder and gratitude for the world we live in, and through healthy discussion and prayer. (S8)

(continued)

Table 2. Continued.

Aspect	Aspect count	Aspect Scope	Text example
Library systems skills and management	24	<i>Manage, establish and monitor the physical and Information and Communication Technology (ICT) systems in the library. Develop information systems and services responsive to student and teacher needs. Have a strong knowledge of library management systems.</i>	To coordinate library staff (teaching and education support) and effectively manage the resources, borrowing system and facility of the Library. (S34)
Provide ICT support for staff and students	24	<i>Imbed ICT across the curriculum. Teach ICT skills, and provide ICT support. Train staff in ICT use. Remain knowledgeable of developments in digital information technologies. Be proficient in the use of assistive technologies for inclusive education.</i>	Provide support and assistance to teachers in the effective use of Information and Communication Technologies. Collaboratively work with the IT Team to implement needed IT infrastructure for teaching and learning. (S27)
Co-curricular and extra-curricular responsibilities	23	<i>Supervise and provide coaching or supportive input in sporting or cultural co-curricular activities. Be available outside standard school hours including holiday periods to support students. Attend school functions, social activities, meetings and parent/teacher nights. Make presentations when necessary. Initiate and support the development of new initiatives such as book clubs.</i>	There is an expectation that all teachers of (the school) will involve themselves in co-curriculum activities offered to the students of the (School). Conduct practice sessions before, during or after school for the co-curricular activity. Attend competitive fixtures with the team or group of students, as they are scheduled. Provide the appropriate duty of care and supervision to the students that the teacher is in charge of. (S15)
Child safety and wellbeing	22	<i>Administer first aid as required. Show care for student welfare and develop supportive relationships with them. Promote students' physical, emotional and mental wellbeing. Show understanding of and commitment to legal and moral obligations relating to child safety. Hold current first aid accreditation. Complete training in and adhere to mandatory reporting requirements.</i>	Safeguard and promote the safety, welfare and wellbeing of children and young people. Providing First Aid assistance as required. (S7)
Personal ICT skills	22	<i>Have advanced ICT skills. Have good understanding of learning technologies and their application to enhance learning. Be committed to continual development of ICT skills. Build knowledge in new and emerging technologies.</i>	Being proficient in the use of ICT and online learning environments with an enthusiastic approach to learn more so that students and staff are supported in their learning. (S6)
Adhere to and implement policies	21	<i>Implement a range of school specific policies on discipline, uniform, behavior, study, safety and attendance. Adhere to broader state policies and legislation.</i>	Knowing and implementing the (School) Strategic Plan, school policies and other legislative requirements ... (S2)
Collaboration and communication with parents and community	19	<i>Encourage parental involvement with the school. Build productive partnerships and a strong connection with the school community. Liaise and communicate with parents as primary stakeholders in their child's education. Engage parents and community members as library volunteers.</i>	The Teacher-Librarian/Literacy Specialist will build a co-operative partnership with parents, teachers, students and the (School) community in working toward the achievement of the (school's) aims ... Encouraging the appropriate involvement of parents and other community members in the life of the (School). (S15)
Document and develop policies, plans and procedures	18	<i>Develop, document and evaluate library policies, goals and objectives in line with the school's strategic goals. Develop short-term and long-term strategic and operational plans for the library learning</i>	Contribute to the development of library policy, procedures and processes and provide recommendations to the Library Manager for change when appropriate. (S9)

(continued)

**Table 2.** Continued.

Aspect	Aspect count	Aspect Scope	Text example
Meet diverse student needs	18	<i>environment. Organize and implement efficient procedures for the delivery of library services and resource selection. Amend policies, plans and procedures as required in response to changing needs. Cater to diverse student skills, abilities, knowledge and interests. Support students with special needs. Help to identify students needing teaching adjustments.</i>	Plan taking into consideration the needs, interests and developmental stage of children e.g. cognitive, physical, social, emotional, language and perceptual needs as well as socio-economic, cultural and religious background of all children. (S36)
Supervision and duty of care	18	<i>Perform yard duties and undertake teaching and non-teaching supervisory duties. Supervise students with diverse needs or behavioral issues.</i>	(Provide) supervision of students during lunch times and after school until 4.30pm. (Care) pastorally for students with special or other needs who regularly spend time in the Library or need time out from the classroom. (S33)
Resilience	17	<i>Have capacity to deal with multiple tasks. Manage time effectively. Show flexibility and perform under pressure.</i>	Remain flexible in regard to rosters, desk duties, borrower services and circulation tasks. (Show) flexibility with a high degree of motivation for the role. (Have a) track record of being approachable with an empathetic work ethic. (Be) adaptable and able to work well under pressure. (S11)
Workplace health and safety (WHS)	17	<i>Perform WHS duties as required, including evacuation drills. Adhere to and ensure that library spaces are compliant with WHS policies, plans and procedures. Promote a healthy and positive workplace culture. Report any safety issues as per policy.</i>	Contribute to a healthy and safe work environment for self and others and comply with all safe work policies and procedures. (S32)
Increase the use of library	16	<i>Develop frameworks to optimize library use. Promote library services within the school. Run engaging orientation programs for new users. Promote library-based events and report about such activities to the school community.</i>	Promotion of library activities and services throughout the (School) community utilizing tools such as the (School) newsletter, webpage and mobile applications. (S17)
Student assessment and reporting	16	<i>Have knowledge of and apply current assessment theory and processes. Use various applicable modes of assessment. Provide regular, timely, constructive and clear feedback to students and families about student performance. Provide formal reports on student progress. Meet reporting requirements as per school policy and deadlines. Provide transparent guidance around assessment criteria. Identify learner needs through assessment. Set developmentally appropriate assessments.</i>	Use a variety of relevant and appropriate assessment and evaluation techniques to regularly assess student progress. Provide regular, timely and positive feedback to each student on their progress. Provide formal, interim and semester reports to parents and students that conform to the (School) Reporting Style Guide. (S23)
Engage students in learning	15	<i>Build relationships with students drawing on current teaching and learning practices.</i>	Actively engages students in the planning and learning process, perceiving that learning is an active and collaborative venture, both between the teacher and students. Considers the students' own experience to be a fundamental and especially valuable resource. (S15)

(continued)

**Table 2.** Continued.

Aspect	Aspect count	Aspect Scope	Text example
Experience	15	<i>Have previous experience as a teacher librarian working in a school library. Have experience working with the Australian Curriculum and state/territory specific curriculum requirements. Have previous experience demonstrating leadership and collaboration. Have experience in a primary/secondary education setting. Have experience working with a particular sex (single-sex schools). Have experience with managing physical and digital collections. Have experience supporting inquiry-based learning.</i>	Demonstrated experience in leading a library/resource center is desirable, including supervision and development of staff, systems management and resource management. Experience working successfully and collaboratively with other team members. (S17)
Leadership	15	<i>Contribute to the broader curriculum leadership of the school. Model strong and effective leadership practices.</i>	The Teacher Librarian will provide leadership in relation to the successful operations of the library, its services to the (School) community and management of an effective library team. (S3)
Staff leadership and coordination	15	<i>Coordinate the roles and duties of library staff and volunteers.</i>	Provide guidance and support to library staff to ensure that the day-to-day administration of the school information center is efficient and that systems, resources and equipment are well maintained. (S40)
Data collection, management and reporting	14	<i>Evaluate library performance by collecting and analyzing performance data to inform planning. Monitor and report on student borrowing patterns. Report on the library's support for teaching and learning, highlighting significant developments and identifying future needs. Ensure that confidential information is handled appropriately.</i>	Measure library resources, facilities, programs and services against current policies, standards document and benchmarks. (S14)
Behavior management	13	<i>Set and maintain clear behavioral expectations for students. Use appropriate behavior management strategies to facilitate student learning and ensure student safety.</i>	Employ behavior management strategies which ensure a safe, orderly and successful learning environment. (S30)

To answer the first research question, a joint display approach (Guetterman et al., 2015) was selected to report the data in relation to how literacy education is situated within the requirements and responsibilities of Australian teacher librarians. As per Table 2 in the results, this joint display presents an aspect of a role or responsibility that emerged from the inductive approach. The shift to a deductive approach in the subsequent analysis of these data allowed for counts of prevalence as previously explained. Only highly salient (recurring across at least 25% of the documents) aspects were included, and therefore the role and responsibilities presented in Table 2 excludes many recurring facets that did not meet this salience criterion, such as ability to work independently, which recurred across nine of the 40 documents. As such, the role can be far more diverse than what is depicted here, however in the interests of presenting the most common facets of the role as per the sample, this salience criterion was imposed. A composite statement of scope was generated for each salient aspect to show

what this aspect could include. Overlap between these aspects were common, and aspects were purposefully separated in a number of cases. For example, as can be seen in the text example for administration and day-to-day tasks, this can include staff management, however this recurred in the data as an aspect warranting its own inclusion separate from administration. Finally, the table includes a representative excerpt from the job description documents, so that the reader can engage with a primary source example of how the aspect was presented in the original data source. In these excerpts featured in [Tables 2](#) and [3](#), while text is verbatim in wording, in some cases clauses/sentences are linked in the text example that were dispersed in the original document for ease of readability.

To answer the second research question, the composite statement of scope of the literacy educator aspect generated from the facets emerging from the job description text that was presented in [Table 2](#) was subject to further analysis. The facets of this statement of scope were then teased out into the seven related sub-themes. These themes are then presented in [Table 3](#) alongside text examples and discussed in relation to the extant research where possible.

## Findings and discussion

### *Literacy education within the role requirements and responsibilities*

As per [Table 2](#), literacy and literature education is a key recurring aspect of the role in the job descriptions of teacher librarians, highly salient at 90% of job descriptions in this sample. However, it clearly occurs as part of a potentially complex and demanding position. Teacher librarians have previously noted that the sheer diversity of their role requirements can hinder their capacity to promote literacy and literature learning (Merga, 2019a), and this job description analysis provides further support for their contention. For example, teacher librarians are teaching both within and outside the library, providing instruction on typical library content (e.g. literature, literacy, information literacy, digital citizenship), while also being classroom teachers of core curriculum.

As per [Table 2](#), all of the job descriptions included a teaching role, and the vast majority also described the importance of collaboration and teamwork, collection and resource building and provision, literacy education, information skills support, and the library and learning environment. Even where these roles and requirements were not explicitly addressed, this does not mean that the ultimate role would exclude these facets, as also noteworthy were the prevalence of delegated and unspecified responsibilities, which appeared in 72.5% of the job descriptions, where teacher librarians were expected to perform tasks beyond those specified in the documents.

As can be seen in [Table 2](#), the composite aspect scope statements generated for each aspect of the role highlight the complexity both of the role as a whole, but also the aspects within it, and many of these are individually substantial. The co-curricular and extra-curricular responsibilities would see at least 57.5% of the successful candidates of these applications losing lunches, nights and weekends in the service of the school, without necessarily receiving remuneration for this time. A number of aspects required ongoing learning. For example, the need to remain abreast of ICT could be viewed as a relatively new facet of the position, requiring that teacher librarians “combine their

**Table 3.** Subthemes of teacher librarian role as literacy educator.

Subtheme	Related scope content	Text example
Teaching for reading engagement and literacy	<i>Plan and facilitate contemporary student-centered reading programs. Link literary texts with curriculum units where appropriate. Collaborate with other teaching staff to promote literacy and literature. Provide training and information for staff and parents in reading, literacy and literature. Support teachers to enhance student literacy skills. Develop strategies to foster a love of reading and literature for leisure.</i>	Develop and lead programs to promote and improve literacy through reading. Support teachers to increase literacy and reading comprehension at all levels. (S19)
Text and reading promotion and student choice	<i>Promote a diverse range of text types and themes, from varied cultural perspectives. Conduct book talks, make recommendations and guide students' recreational reading choices. Promote literature to staff. Promote the benefits of regular reading for academic performance. Plan, promote and conduct displays and events to encourage reading.</i>	Conduct Book Talks and recommend suitable reading material in order to inspire, engage and guide readers. (S26)
Collection knowledge, building and curation	<i>Draw on a range of resources to make informed choices about collection development and publicize and promote new acquisitions. Possess an extensive knowledge of children's literature across a breadth of genres. Read junior and young adult fiction acquisitions.</i>	Use a range of publishers, literature websites and journals to make informed choices about collection development for young adults. (S29)
Whole-school reading culture	<i>Foster and maintain a school culture that promotes reading and literature.</i>	Develop a community-wide reading culture through the regular and active promotion of literature. (S24)
Reading environment	<i>Provide an environment conducive to reading.</i>	Provide an environment and atmosphere that is attractive and welcoming to boys and conducive to reading. (S22)
Modeling	<i>Model reading engagement and enjoyment.</i>	Ideally, the position of Teacher Librarian would be a member of staff who could represent and advocate for the quality teaching of English in all its forms, and the joyful association of reading and learning. (S20)

information specialist roles with technology integration” (Wine, 2016, p. 207). However, remaining abreast of new innovations in ICT can be a highly time consuming and demanding facet of the role, and this analysis suggests that in some cases, teacher librarians are also acting in an ICT support and troubleshooting role, potentially requiring an even greater range and depth of ICT skills. They are also often expected to lead their communities in professional learning, reflecting Dees et al.’s contention that the “librarian is in a key position to contribute to the development of strong professional learning communities through professional development and technology integration”



(2010, p. 10). As the role expands over time to be responsive to changing technologies and educational expectations, contexts and resources, it raises questions about whether it is becoming potentially untenable. It also raises questions about how, without substantial staffing and resourcing support, teacher librarians can perform each aspect of the role to maximize student learning, and which aspects are ultimately prioritized if staffing and resourcing are insufficient to meet the demands of the role.

### ***Scope of the literacy educator aspect of the role***

While the scope of the literacy educator aspect of the role (Table 2) shows that the expected contribution of the role may be complex and substantial, as per Table 3 below, this aspect can be analyzed in relation to subthemes within it. This scope can be grouped into seven subthemes: teaching for reading engagement and literacy; text promotion and student choice; collection knowledge, building and curation; whole-school reading culture; reading conducive spaces; and modeling. These subthemes can be further explored in relation to some of the extant research.

### ***Teaching for reading engagement and literacy***

Teacher librarians may plan and teach reading and literacy programs. Despite the aforementioned research linking school librarians with positive literacy outcomes for students, surprisingly little research evaluates how the aspects of such programs may be linked to student literacy learning. There is, however, interest in how teacher and school librarians may collaborate with their classroom teacher colleagues for educative purposes, including to promote literacy and literature (e.g. Merga, 2019b). While there is mention of aligning literary texts with curricular purpose, the emphasis in library-based reading instruction may be predominantly on fostering reading engagement, similar to Cremin and Swann (2016) findings around voluntary reading groups in schools. The position of the teacher librarian as a literacy expert in the school was seen in the expectation that they provide training for staff and parents in reading, literacy and literature, and previous research has also explored how teacher librarians enact practices designed to enhance student literacy skills (Merga, 2019c).

### ***Text promotion and student choice***

It was interesting to note that there was mention of promoting texts that include an array of cultural perspectives, which is responsive to the culturally diverse composition of most schools. In the context of continued privileging of canonical texts that lack this diversity of cultural representation, school librarians can play a valuable role in sharing texts presenting culturally diverse perspectives and themes with students (Lafferty, 2014). While there is research exploring how discussion of books can influence students' attitudes toward books and reading (Alvermann et al., 1999; Ivey & Johnston, 2013), there is little research that explores how librarian's use of book talks and book promotion strategies such as events and displays may impact on students. Promoting literature to staff can be valuable as part of a broader plan to increase the number of avid reading



models that students are exposed to (Applegate & Applegate, 2004; Cremin et al., 2009), as explored further in relation to modeling herein. In addition, research suggests that teachers who value reading make greater use of the best literacy practices (McKool & Gespass, 2009), and therefore encouraging teachers to become avid readers could potentially enhance their pedagogy. In addition, students may struggle to select appealing reading materials (Merga & Roni, 2017). Therefore teacher librarians can play an importance role in informing and supporting students' choices, and teaching them strategies to facilitate independent choice.

### ***Collection knowledge, building and curation***

Teacher librarians were required to draw on diverse resources to build the collection, including garnering acquisition recommendations from the students themselves, and this reflects the contention that young people should be a principal consultant in the building of collections that reflect their interests and cultures (Aggleton, 2018). This aspect of the role was reliant on teacher librarians' possessing broad knowledge of children's literature across genres, and that they maintain abreast of reading acquisitions, which was interesting in relation to previous research that suggests that in schools with large libraries, this aspect of the role could be extremely time consuming (e.g. Merga, 2019a). However, teacher librarians would doubtlessly be better situated to recommend texts where they have strong familiarity with them, enabling them to relate them to students' unique interests and abilities, and therefore this aspect is closely related to the previous on text promotion.

### ***Whole-school reading culture***

Creating classroom and school cultures that support reading engagement can motivate students to read and be responsive to the critical role that motivation can play in learning (Gambrell, 1996). The requirement that teacher librarians foster a school reading culture reflects a social positioning of reading that recognizes "the importance of the cultural and material context for reading in shaping how it gets done" (Cremin & Moss, 2018, p. 59). While reading skill development in schools is increasingly centered around testing and narrowed focus on single facets within the broad skill base involved in reading achievement, a UK All-Party Parliamentary Group for Education (2011) report argues against this narrow perspective, suggesting that "schools need to develop a culture of reading" (p. 4). The teacher librarian therefore may act as a counterpoint to a prevailing limited conceptualization of reading and literacy learning by prioritizing a whole-school culture of enjoyment and motivation.

### ***Reading conducive spaces***

As per Table 2, 85% of job descriptions made reference to the library as a learning environment, and the role that teacher librarians need to play in facilitating and resourcing this space, and the library environment can be used for an array of diverse purposes such as providing a safe space and fostering student wellbeing (e.g. Hughes

et al., 2019; Merga, 2020b). However, the role of this environment in facilitating sustained reading emerged as notable for literacy learning due to the aforementioned associations between reading and literacy benefit. The way a library space is structured, and factors such as level of noise can encourage or inhibit reading behaviors (Cremin & Swann, 2016; Loh, 2020) even for confident readers (Merga, 2017a), and this was recognized in the job descriptions' emphasis on providing an environment conducive to reading. More broadly, as noted by Loh (2016), "a library is a problematic space of possible inequities that requires further research" (p. 12), and the resources, affordances and use of space within a library can potentially impact upon student reading opportunities and possibilities. In addition, this purpose of the library is inclusive of the aforementioned wellbeing purpose, with reading for pleasure can foster wellbeing (Merga, 2017b), and positive attitudes toward reading may be linked to wellbeing in young people (Clark & Teravainen-Goff, 2018).

### **Modeling**

Young people can benefit from having social influences such as parents, teachers and peers modeling life-long reader ideation and practice, however not all teachers are perceived to be keen readers (Merga, 2016), and teachers' demonstration of engagement with literature may be limited due to the current demands of the curriculum (Cremin et al., 2008). In addition, research with pre-service and practicing teachers has found that not all teachers are avid readers (Applegate & Applegate, 2004; Vansteelandt et al., 2017), and therefore having a teacher librarian who can model reading engagement and enjoyment may be important to ensure that students encounter keen reading models in their school environment.

### **Conclusion**

Poor valuing and understanding of the requirements of the role of teacher librarian can greatly hinder their professional satisfaction as well as their job security (e.g. Merga, 2019a), and the findings in this article suggest that the role of teacher librarian is highly diverse, with the literacy educator aspect of the role part of a complex and disparate set of responsibilities and requirements. The literacy educator aspect of the role is also, in itself, diverse, as captured in the scope in this article, and in particular, the composite statement of the scope of this aspect. While there is some overlap between this role and what is expected of a classroom teacher, the literacy educator aspect of the teacher librarian role is also unique in many facets, such as collection knowledge, building and curation. It also stands to fill recognized gaps in areas such as modeling, which classroom teachers may not have time or inclination to enact, and countering a reading for testing culture (Merga, 2016) in contemporary schools to encourage reading for pleasure.

As explained in the introduction, this article does not capture the contribution of teacher librarians to all facets of literacy learning. To achieve this goal is beyond the scope of a journal article due to the complex and diverse contributions of teacher librarians, as seen in Table 2. Future research across a series of articles or book could

endeavor to capture this contribution across a more holistic array of literacies. This article also raised possible limitations of international comparison, due to the different qualifications required of the role. Further research should explore the similarities and differences in the role descriptions between these and other nations, as at present, their comparability is assumed rather than established.

Finally, this article raises questions around the adequacy of support teacher librarians may receive in performing their workload, which commonly demands duties not previously defined; extended work hours without necessarily including remuneration for this work; and remaining abreast of innovations across a diverse professional body of knowledge, including rapidly evolving ICT affordances. With teacher librarians raising concerns previously about their ability to meet the literacy educator aspect of their role amongst its competing demands (Merga, 2019a), and this role linked to literacy benefits for students, continued cuts to the resources and staffing of libraries must be seriously addressed to ensure that negative literacy outcomes for students do not result from this persistent erosion (e.g. Ahlfeld, 2019; Kachel, 2015; Softlink, 2020; Teravainen & Clark, 2017). Ideally, this article may also entice teacher librarians' colleagues and leadership to work more closely and supportively with them to achieve shared student literacy goals.

## ORCID

Margaret K. Merga  <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-9009-3700>

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