

Inquiry into school libraries and teacher librarians in Australian schools.

I write to state that a school library under the direction of a teacher librarian is a space where:

- * love of written and spoken language is nurtured.
- * personal and social issues can find a forum for discussion and support.
- * community involvement reinforces the notion of school as family.
- * the world and the child's place within it, can find meaning.

I will include anecdotes to illustrate each of these points.

My name is Celeste Walters. I have been a primary teacher in Victorian State Schools and, for most of my working life, a lecturer in education within the School of Education at Deakin University. In 2009 I was inducted into the Who's Who of Australian Women for my contribution to education in Australia.

That the institution of the school library and those who serve it, might be modified – other than for the extension and enhancement of resources – fills me with despair.

The intellectual and social value of this precious book-filled environment is without measure.

Let me illustrate:

- The library at a school in the western suburbs of Melbourne was small. Rather than use up the space in shelving, the teacher had the books hanging from the ceiling in netting and accessed by the children with pullies, thus leaving space for story telling, and for 'theatre.' We all know that children learn through play. But in this instance they are also learning to listen, to concentrate, to express themselves clearly and use their imagination. Such teacher librarians are priceless.

- At a certain school a boy in grade 6 sought books on bullying. The teacher librarian approached the boy's class teacher who was unaware that this behaviour was going on, and measures were taken . . . What better example of how an issue can be tackled, simply by linking the library with the classroom. I could furnish more examples, believe me.

- Parents in the library, covering and marking books, learn from each other of the value –and use- of books in the home. This can be an insightful learning tool for the teacher librarian too, but, most of all it is reinforcing in the child’s mind that books are important and that inside the covers there are treasures to be found . . .
- My grand-daughter, Lizzie, (5) goes to bed , not with Teddy but her library bag. The library at Elwood Primary is indeed a place to be. One that can become a fairy’s grotto, a underground cavern for mini-beasts, a walk through ancient Egypt. Here there’s life, love and imagination, where books are gobbled up in multiple number. Here, there’s beauty . . .Here, learning is fun. . .

In supervising students in their practicum, I have witnessed children grow in confidence, in social acuity, and most importantly, in the understanding of how their language works and the means to use it.

Tragically we have been witness to a growing and insidious dumbing down of thought, of imagination and creativity –of the vision splendid. We are ignorant of the syntax and semantics of our language –we cannot spell; evidence of which is reinforced by the media, particularly television, like . . . ‘-he deteriorated.’ . . . ‘-he swam well,’And the best, a response to a death by drowning ‘ - if yer on the ground unconscious at least ya know where yer are.’

My son is a barrister, he has four children but no television, and the lone computer is rigorously supervised. During a recent meeting at the Law Institute it was discovered that 75% of those present had elected not to have television in their homes. They all had, however, a library of books.

Pit that against the current screen culture, the cyber world of the here and now, where you’re stuck in the moment, where you’re bombarded with flashes of sound and colour, where there are no consequences to actions, no grasp of reality, no chums that are not cardboard cut-outs –where exists only a fatuous notion of self-importance and a lasting inability to communicate with the real world . . .

I remember once being with a great many people in a great big theatre and how we all clapped hands, grown-ups and kiddies alike, to show the world that we

believed in fairies. And at the moment we did, Tinker Bell awoke from her dread slumber and once more began to fly

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