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Secretary
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Inquiry into school libraries and teacher librarians in Australian Schools

Contributor's background

I am a teacher librarian currently employed in a catholic diocesan primary school on the north shore of Sydney. I have been teaching either full time or permanent part-time in state or Catholic primary schools since 1970, after completing my BA, Dip.Ed.at the University of Sydney. I have taught overseas and while teaching in Surrey, England I was awarded my English Teachers' Certificate. I subsequently trained as a special education teacher and teacher librarian and went on to obtain M.A.(Ed.) Syd. and M.A.(Creat.Writ.) University of Western Sydney, and later, up-graded my librarian qualifications, obtaining a Grad.Dip.in Information at University of Technology. I also obtained Certificate II in Information Technology at TAFE. I am the author, co-author, editor or reading advisor of more than 50 published books for children and teachers. I am a member of a number of professional writing and librarian associations including the Catholic Primary Teacher Librarians Association, Children's Book Council of Australia and the Australian Society of Authors and Society of Children's Book Writers and Illustrators.

With my background and experience I would like to raise a number of issues regarding the role, adequacy and resourcing of school libraries and teacher librarians in Australian Schools that the committee may wish to consider in their report.

The role and responsibilities of the teacher librarian

The roles and responsibilities of the teacher librarian are extremely varied and cover each of the important areas of Teaching and Learning, Leadership, Curriculum involvement, Management, Literature Promotion and Services, see attachment.

While it is vital for teacher librarians to fulfill their roles and responsibilities in all of these areas, in a primary school for children K - Y6, two areas are critical in preparing students as life-long learners who can adapt to the challenges of the 21st century.

These are:

- literature promotion, thereby developing literacy and a life-long love of reading and learning
- teaching and developing information, communication, and technology skills for students to seek, critically evaluate, synthesise and present information

To provide these crucial roles and responsibilities schools need qualified and experienced teacher librarians that can look to the future and manage change. We want professionals, namely teacher librarians, who are grounded in the essence of overall library education. This implies that they are also up-to-date with new technologies or they are participating in courses to become so. And after all, if we are life-long learners we are all up-dating, all the time.

I believe that new technological advances should be harnessed to make the library more efficient, effective and relevant. There have been indications, however, that some administrators think that new technologies are heralding a new direction in libraries, in which technicians can be employed (at a lower rate than teacher librarians) and provide similar services. They fail to comprehend that new technologies are tools and for these tools to be delivered in an educationally sound and effective manner a qualified and experienced teacher librarian is required who understands the curriculum, the learners, and resources and technologies used whether books, internet or other media. A sound knowledge and understanding of the role of the library is essential. If you lose sight of that role you are just responding to changes in technology without fulfilling the fundamental instructional, educational and resource function of the library.

Technicians are important to the overall efficiency and effectiveness of most modern businesses and organizations. Teacher librarians recognise the key support that technicians can provide in the library as they do in the classrooms for class teachers. No one would suggest that the technician take over the role of the class teacher, nor should they suggest that technicians should take over the role of the teacher librarian.

The Impact of recent policies and investments on school libraries and their activities

There has been great excitement and anticipation over the provision of new, state-of-the-art libraries in at least half a dozen or more schools in our diocese. However, it appears that there was no consultation with teacher librarians regarding the plans drawn up for the new libraries. If there had been consultation with experienced teacher librarians there would have been provision made for an appropriate office/workroom/storage space for the teacher librarian.

Exactly why the new libraries are not being provided with appropriate professional office/workroom/storage space for the teacher librarian is unclear. It appears that it could be related to the manner in which these buildings have been funded. Perhaps, as it has been suggested to me, the money was pooled and therefore local authorities or principals had the choice of

providing the library as a rectangular “flexible open-space” thereby transferring funds from the library office into other areas, particularly the provision of technology. While the need for some flexibility to meet local needs is important, it is also important that money given by the federal government for the libraries should go to the libraries. Most teacher librarians would jump at the chance of getting an electronic whiteboard, but would they do so at the cost of basic facilities? After all there is other money available for technology.

Intrinsic to the effective and efficient organization of a library is the provision of an adequate and appropriate professional space for the Teacher-Librarian to facilitate the management, curriculum and services roles of the library. This space includes:

- * A circulation desk
- * A number of Enquiry work stations (for use by students)
- * An adequate office/workroom/storeroom that can be locked (OH&S) with
- * Storage cupboards for library supplies and cleaning materials
- * Shelves for library administrative files and teaching resources
- * Desk for the Teacher Librarian with laptop for teaching tasks and the acquisition, processing, production and maintenance of information resources
- * Desk for the Library Assistant or helpers with computer for data entry
- * Workbench at the appropriate OH&S height for unpacking, sorting, covering, repairing, laminating etc for use by library staff & parent helpers
- * facilities for previewing, planning and production, including multimedia production
- * Sink for washing hands after shelving, cleaning, gluing, repairing & covering items
- * A phone for administrative duties
- * a photocopy machine for use by teacher librarian and teachers
- * air conditioning

All previous libraries in our diocese have such facilities for teacher librarians to carry out their responsibilities to meet the educational, cultural and recreational needs of students and the professional needs of teachers. It appears that in 2010 we are to have state-of-the-art libraries with facilities for the teacher librarians that are pre-1980s.

In a number of new libraries the configuration or layout and positioning of various internal management features such as the circulation desk, crucial for traffic flow in the library, were not planned appropriately and without consultation with the librarians concerned. This kind of ad hoc planning has implications for OH&S and the efficient and effective running of the library. In one case the teacher librarian was told that the circulation desk (built in with cupboards around as an excuse for an office/workroom/storage space) was placed in a corner away from the door because the electricians said so. In another case the librarian whose new library also has no office/workroom/storage space has been given a room downstairs in another part of the building as her office. You can imagine how efficient and flexible this makes her role as she is not even available in her library to supervise students or retrieve resources for teachers during her library administration time, not to mention the OH&S issues of her carting books and equipment up and down stairs to the library.

Teacher librarians are extremely conscious of the need for a multi-function and flexible use of libraries. Opportunity has been lost to provide an office/workroom/storeroom with a dual purpose as a sound recording/multimedia production area (as I suggested to my principal) that could be used under

staff supervision by students. Also without separate office/workrooms there is a more limited use of the libraries for meetings and events etc during the teacher librarian administration days since the teacher librarian, library assistant and/or helpers will be working in the open plan library at that time.

As mentioned there are also important OH&S issues related to the lack of provision of a suitable work/storage room and related facilities. Lack of office/work/storage space to permit effective organization and management of both library and school resources can result in the staff involved experiencing physical discomfort, strain and stress. In addition, there are considerable safety issues related to the storage and use of cleaning, covering and repairing materials and chemicals in normal library administration.

Teacher librarians are keen to embrace the most modern and up-to-date support for the students and teachers in all areas of the school curriculum and recognize the changing, flexible and dynamic roles libraries play today and in the future. They would like to participate in this revolution sure that they have the appropriate facilities to provide optimum support to students and teachers and play a critical and central role in the school.

This issue is of such concern in my diocese that twenty-four primary and high school teacher librarians, including myself, signed a letter voicing their concerns to the Catholic Schools Office.

Factors influencing recruitment and development of school librarians

I am not sure if the committee is familiar with the term "relief from face to face teaching". Teachers (and proportionately teacher librarians) are required by their work agreements to receive a certain amount of time release from face-to-face teaching each week.

Prior to the introduction of this agreement and in some schools today, teacher librarians have been able to have flexible time-tables, cooperative teaching with individual or groups of teachers, varied groupings, special small groups or large combined classes for presentations and performances among many other flexible, creative and educationally sound programs and plans.

With the introduction of "relief face-to-face teaching" came the financial battle to provide the relief without spending extra money on relief teachers. Many educational authorities took the view that if they placed library and music lessons continuous, back-to-back, the class teachers would then get the appropriate relief time.

This timetabling changed not only the flexibility and cooperative planning and teaching aspects of the role of the teacher librarian but also the attitude towards the role and responsibilities of the teacher librarian. Now, instead of being seen as a central player, pivotal to the coordination, planning, teaching and resourcing of the curriculum, the teacher librarian is often seen merely as a "relief" teacher to provide teachers with "time off". No teacher librarian is grudging the time to the teachers, all of us know how hard they work under constant and changing pressure. What teacher librarians despair at is what the school, the children and they have lost under this restrictive and counter productive timetabling.

Unless there can be a change to this system, the recruitment and development of school librarians will be limited. Young, vital, constructive, creative teachers with visions for leading the school's information services into the future will hardly be attracted to embark on special training for simply a "relief from face-to-face" job. And since nearly all teacher librarian positions in primary schools at least, are part-time it is rarely possible to hold a teacher librarian position and be on the executive of a school. Again, teacher librarians miss out on playing an important leadership role and there is little incentive to attract new teachers to the role if it is not seen as a stepping stone to promotion.

The role the teacher librarian ultimately plays in a school is fundamentally dependent on the attitude of the principal. Most principals support the important role of the teacher librarian while others give lip service to that support. If the principal, however, consults with, supports, and encourages their teacher librarian then amazing programs and services can be provided for the students and the teachers. If on the other hand, this support is lacking, it becomes more difficult for the teacher librarian to achieve such goals. The principals' understanding of the crucial and changing role of teacher librarians is important to the recruitment and development of teacher librarians.

Finally I would like to say a few words in support of library clerical assistants, who seem to be a dying breed because the money that would employ them is being re-allocated. In both state and Catholic schools that I have worked as a teacher librarian I have always had a part-time library clerical assistant. However, quite a number of new teacher librarians are being appointed to libraries that no longer have assistants. They seem to think that I, and other teacher librarians that have assistants, are lucky, instead of being outraged that they themselves have not been allocated the appropriate support they need to carry out their roles effectively. By having an assistant to carry out clerical tasks in the library I am able to give more time to my teaching and resourcing of the curriculum roles and therefore further able to benefit the children and the teachers of the school. The important role of library clerical assistants should be recognized and supported and they should be appointed in every school.

In conclusion, I feel that guidelines and policies should be established by the government, in consultation with teacher librarian representatives and educational authorities, to clearly direct the appropriate procedures in the staffing of libraries and in the designing, planning and implementation of library facilities to ensure optimal use of the tax payers money for such endeavours.

In particular:

- * School libraries should be staff by qualified, experienced teacher librarians
- * The configuration of library facilities should maximise the educational and instructional function of the library and ensure OH&S compliance
- * appropriate professional office/workroom/storage space should be part and parcel of the physical design of libraries
- * teacher librarians should not be used as relief teachers but rather their substantive role as teacher librarians should be acknowledged
- * Management support of and consultation with teacher librarians are significant contributors towards the success of the role of the library in children's education being realised

* The essential role of the clerical assistant should be recognized and reaffirmed and their appointment to schools to support the teacher librarian should be standard practice.

Thank you for consideration of my submission.

Yours faithfully

Margaret Roc