



Submission to the Australian Federal Government's 'Inquiry into School Libraries and Teacher Librarians in Australian Schools'

16 April 2010

I am making this submission on behalf of Teacher Librarians employed in Catholic schools in the Archdiocese of Canberra & Goulburn. The Catholic Education Office does not officially endorse this submission.

Mr. Dennis Granlund
(Library Services Officer)

The Archdiocese of Canberra & Goulburn administers 55 schools. Half of the schools are located in the ACT, and half in NSW. Over 20,000 students are enrolled in Catholic schools in this Archdiocese.

Responses to the Terms of Reference

1. the impact of recent policies and investments on school libraries and their activities;

The following Australian federal government policies are having an impact on school libraries in the Archdiocese of Canberra and Goulburn:

- I. BER funding for construction of new libraries and renovations to existing libraries;
- II. NAPLAN testing and the 'Myschool' website;
- III. Creation of a national curriculum for Australian schools;
- IV. 'Digital Revolution' initiative.

These policies have been welcomed by Catholic school Teacher Librarians. They have provided a stimulus to schools that has the potential to lead to an improvement in learning outcomes for students in our schools. Improvements to student achievement will, however, also require attention to additional school library infrastructure and library staffing in order to guarantee positive outcomes for student achievement.

Issues Related to Government Policies and Recommendations

I. Stimulus Package for School Library Buildings:

- In many cases, the funds made available to build or renovate school libraries are not sufficient to provide adequate shelving, furniture and other interior fittings. Extra funding is required for this purpose.
- School library collections need to be upgraded to stock the new

libraries. Existing school funds are insufficient to upgrade collections. Government grants are required for collection development.

- If provided with adequate infrastructure and time, Teacher Librarians are able to provide physical facilities that are effectively designed, adequate for the student body, welcoming and conducive to study.
- School libraries require sufficient professional Teacher Librarians and ancillary staff to manage the building, its collection and the teaching of the school library information literacy curriculum. Libraries should be staffed continuously throughout the week to make full use of the considerable investment. Extra funding is required to meet these requirements.

II. NAPLAN testing and the ‘Myschool’ website

- The impact of library information literacy teaching programs is not evident from the NAPLAN test results. School reports should include library teaching program assessment results.
- NAPLAN testing has resulted in increased demand by teachers for literacy and numeracy resources from school libraries. Extra resources and staff time are required to meet this demand.

III. Creation of a national curriculum for Australian schools

The creation of a national curriculum for Australian schools is to be commended. Its implementation will require school libraries to be resourced to match the new curriculum topics.

- Extra government grants will be required for the purchase of these resources and covering materials. Current school funds are insufficient for this purpose.
- The annual Commonwealth book grant for all school libraries, that was cancelled a few years ago, should be re-introduced.
- Sufficient Teacher Librarian and library support staff time will be needed to order and accession the resources. Many libraries are not provided with enough staff time allocation to complete this processing. Extra funds to employ staff to do this processing will be required.
- Teacher Librarians will also require extra time to adjust their library information literacy teaching programs to match the new national curriculum topics.

IV. ‘Digital Revolution’ Initiative.

Comments about the Digital Revolution initiative will be made in response to ‘Terms of Reference #5’ in this submission.

2. the future potential of school libraries and librarians to contribute to improved educational and community outcomes, especially literacy.

The Australian School Library Association has identified the positive impact school libraries and Teacher Librarians have on student achievement, in their research report 'Impact of School Libraries on Student Achievement: A Review of the Research' (2003) by Michele Lonsdale.

ASLA has also emphasised the importance of the Teacher Librarian to the teaching learning programs of schools, in its document 'Learning for the Future: Developing Information Services in Schools' (2001). The Teacher Librarian is seen as both an educator and information manager who works with teachers to achieve outcomes related to the provision of school information services.

Teacher Librarians have three major roles:

- i) Curriculum leader.
- ii) Information specialist.
- iii) Information Service Provider.

“ Information services staff manage the information centre and its services to ensure that the learning environment is functional and congenial and supports the achievement of agreed student-learning outcomes.” (Learning for the Future p. 41)

The Teacher Librarian:

- provides physical facilities that are effectively designed, adequate for the student body, welcoming and conducive to study;
- tracks trends in ICT's that impact on information management and learning
- optimises the efficiency and security of the storage of information resources and equipment such as book resources, non-book resources, computers and software.

Qualified Teacher Librarians are trained to develop school library information literacy teaching programs. They work with classroom teachers in a cooperative planning and teaching arrangement to complement the school curriculum. By facilitating the role of the Teacher Librarian in Catholic schools, the learning outcomes of students will be enhanced.

The current staffing situation in many of our Catholic schools often does not allow Teacher Librarians sufficient time to work in a cooperative planning and teaching situation, and also to maintain their collections. Primary school Teacher Librarians often are required to teach all the classes in the school in a 'Release from Face to Face' teaching arrangement so that classroom teachers are given preparation and correction time. This situation is not conducive to efficient use of the Teacher Librarian's skills in cooperative planning that will improve the literacy skills of students by working with classroom teachers to teach curriculum topics.

Teacher Librarians often spend the majority of their time teaching RFF classes, and do not have time to maintain their collections. Library ancillary staff are either not employed or are not given enough time to complete collection maintenance either.

Recommendations

Following are requirements for staffing in school libraries that will improve the teaching program, and benefit the literacy outcomes of students:

- Teacher Librarians should not have to do Release from Face to Face teaching.
- Minimum staffing should be required for library support staff.
- Teacher Librarians should be outside the school's staffing formula. The current situation often does not allow full-time staffing of school libraries if library staffing is tied to school enrolments.
- Formal Information Literacy teaching programs are needed. A Scope and Sequence to match Information Literacy skills to the curriculum should be required.
- Qualified Teacher Librarians are needed in order to plan Information Literacy teaching programs. Many school libraries are now staffed with unqualified staff, due to a shortage of Teacher Librarians or school executive decisions.
- Qualified Library Technicians should be employed by all schools. They should not be considered part of the school ancillary staff allocation that often requires staff to work in other areas of the school. They should also not be included as part of the total staffing formula of the library that often causes the combined time of the Teacher Librarian and Library Assistant to be reduced.

These staffing requirements for school libraries can be achieved by Federal government provision of sufficient funds to schools for library staffing, and by developing library staffing guidelines for schools.

3. the factors influencing recruitment and development of school librarians;

The current staffing situation for Teacher Librarians in Catholic schools in the Archdiocese of Canberra and Goulburn, and many other school systems, is for school library staffing to be included in the staffing formula of the school, and for individual school principals to make decisions on the staffing of their libraries. Library staffing is not standard. Catholic Education Office guidelines suggest library staff time be employed as 2/3 teaching, 1/3 maintenance. The specific teaching versus maintenance time for the Teacher Librarian is not outlined. The Teacher Librarian can, in some cases spend all their allocated time teaching, and library support staff carry out the collection maintenance. This is not an advisable situation.

Many Catholic school libraries are staffed part-time by classroom teachers, with no formal Teacher Librarian qualifications, and by library assistants with no library technician qualifications. Some school libraries do not have any library support staff time allocation at all. The Teacher Librarian is expected to teach all of the RFF classes, as well as maintain the collection. This is an unacceptable situation.

There is a shortage of Catholic school Teacher Librarians in the Archdiocese of Canberra & Goulburn. There is no system funding for the training of Teacher Librarians or Library Technicians. There is no on-campus university Teacher Librarianship course in the ACT, but external courses are available via Charles Sturt University and other universities in Australia.

There is no financial incentive for teachers to undertake training as a Teacher Librarian.

A Library Services Officer is employed by the Catholic Education Office to provide advisory support for school libraries and to coordinate professional development meetings for Teacher Librarians. This service is valued by Teacher Librarians. Four professional development meetings are held in the ACT and surrounding NSW regions per year. Teacher Librarians value these opportunities, but there is no system funded Relief provided for Teacher Librarians to attend these meetings, so many Teacher Librarians are not released by their schools, or part-time staff attend the meetings on their days off.

Recommendations

- School library teaching staff should be dual qualified as teachers with additional training in Teacher Librarianship.
- School library support staff should have formal training as Library Technicians. Government and system support is needed to assist with the training of library staff. The NSW Education Department funds library staff to do training in Teacher Librarianship. The Catholic Education Office should also provide assistance for teachers to undertake graduate studies in Teacher Librarianship, along with support from government.
- Staffing of school libraries should be independent of the school staffing formula.
- There should be financial recognition of the dual qualification of Teacher Librarians and of the Library Technician's qualification.
- Relief should be provided for Teacher Librarians to attend system organised professional development meetings.
- System promotion of the role of the Teacher Librarian, and the benefits they can provide to the teaching learning program of the school should occur.

4. the role of different levels of government and local communities and other institutions in partnering with and supporting school librarians;

At present, the Federal, ACT and NSW governments do not have a direct role in creating policy or communicating with school library staff in our archdiocese. There is no direct government support of school libraries, in the form of funding for resource purchases or policy directives to be followed by school systems. The Catholic Education Office has some general policies that apply to school libraries and working conditions for Teacher Librarians, but direct decision making in relation to school libraries and library staffing is left up to each individual school principal. Libraries and library staff are generally not considered separately from the general management of the school and school staff as a whole.

Some local communities and Catholic parishes may support their school libraries with donations of resources and money, but it is not common. School Parents and Citizens associations are often called upon by school administrations to raise funds for

resources and equipment in schools, and some of those funds may be provided to school libraries. School libraries should not have to rely on this funding for the maintenance of their collections, but some do not receive enough general school funds to develop their collections. School libraries used to rely on the support of parent volunteers to assist with collection maintenance, but many parents are now work full-time and are not able to assist in libraries. Libraries generally do not have enough support staff time provided to them to complete collection maintenance.

Some tertiary institutions that operate training courses for Teacher Librarians, such as Charles Sturt University, provide support for Teacher Librarians via channels of communication such as hosting the OZTLNET email Listserv for Teacher Librarians. University staff occasionally conduct professional development sessions for Teacher Librarians.

Recommendations

- Federal Government guidelines for the management of school libraries are needed in order to provide nationwide standards for libraries in matters such as: library buildings, furniture and equipment, collection sizes, and Teacher Librarian and support staff working conditions.
- State Government standard guidelines for school libraries should be compiled, based on the recommendations from the Federal Government Guidelines.
- School systems should provide standard system policies for the management and staffing of school libraries that are based on state and Federal Government guidelines.
- The national curriculum should include reference to the key role that Teacher Librarians, have in the teaching learning programs of schools through the teaching of information literacy skills. A national Information Literacy teaching program 'Scope and Sequence' should be developed.
- State and system education departments should formalise the role of the Teacher Librarian and promote it within the school and wider community.

5. the impact and potential of digital technologies to enhance and support the roles of school libraries and librarians.

The advances in computer technology have provided tremendous opportunities for accessing information over the past 20 years. School libraries and Teacher Librarians have been at the forefront of the development of teaching and learning programs utilising ICT. Library automation programs provide efficient access to suitable library resources, databases and external sources of information for students and teachers.

Teacher Librarians are often the ICT experts of the school who demonstrate advanced uses of ICT in teaching programs to classroom teachers. They can provide instruction in the use of digital technologies, eg digital video systems. This support can assist teachers to improve their teaching and thus improve teaching and learning outcomes.

School libraries require cutting edge access to computer hardware and software programs, however, so that Teacher Librarians can carry out this role. There is often

a lack of up-to-date computer hardware in school libraries, and funds for advanced computer software programs and databases are limited.

Recommendations

- Adequate funding to support digital technology in school libraries is required.
- Guidelines for the standard allocation of computers for school libraries should be developed.
- Computers need to be supplied to school libraries to meet the standard guidelines.
- Standard digital data bases should be supplied to school libraries to meet National Curriculum guidelines. Eg ClickView digital video system, and online periodical subscriptions.
- Financial support is needed for the purchase of latest technology web-based automation systems and support for the training of library staff.

Conclusion

School libraries and Teacher Librarians are central to the teaching and learning programs of schools. The Australian Federal Government has recognised this with the BER funding it has provided for the construction of new school libraries throughout Australia. Libraries are just buildings, however, without a well-established collection of resources and adequate staff to be able to manage the collection and teach students information literacy skills that allow them to become independent learners.

Teacher Librarians and library support staff are well-placed to provide the collection maintenance and teaching program that will improve student achievement. Opportunities for improved learning outcomes for all students in Australia can be provided by the Australian Federal Government through the support of:

- Standard guidelines for the management of school libraries;
- Recommendations for standard staffing of school libraries by qualified Teacher Librarians and Library Technicians outside the staffing formula of the school;
- The provision of funds to provide adequate staffing of all school libraries;
- The re-introduction of the annual Commonwealth book grant for all school libraries;
- Funds to support adequate technology in school libraries.

Thank you.

Dennis Granlund

Libraries Services Officer