



Inquiry into school libraries and teacher librarians in Australian schools – Submission by Dianne Mayne

I trained as a teacher-librarian in 1988 as one of the last groups to have their further training sponsored by the Department. I was given 6 months paid leave to do the first half of the course on the condition I finished the course in my own time within 2 years. It is over 2 decades since then and I often find myself the youngest amongst groups of colleagues. I suspect that being a post graduate course – you need to have qualified and have experience as a teacher before you could apply – made it a less feasible career option for many when they could least afford to take time out. I worry that the profession is not renewing itself and that to many principals, teacher-librarians are appearing old and out of touch. Many administrations I have worked in have principals who been promoted from schools too small to have a TL and therefore don't always understand the role they can play. I know many frustrated TL's who would like to make more of a difference to their school's teaching but are hamstrung by policies, timetabling and resourcing that renders them ineffective.

The recent BER funding for new libraries only served to highlight the ignorance of principals of the TL role. Many did not even consult the TL on the design of the libraries. Sometimes I wonder if it more an exercise in building some edifice to the incumbent school administration, especially in the case of one Gold Coast school principal who ordered that nothing older than 10 years be moved into the new library building. Great in theory but that meant students in that school aren't allowed to have access to world renown classics by Australian authors such as "Possum Magic". A bit like throwing the baby out with the bathwater. Just because something is new doesn't automatically make it better. Principals like this must be balanced by a suitably trained and empowered resource professional.

Historically civilizations are reflected in their libraries, the centre for the knowledge and culture of a society. Today that automatically should include digital technologies as well as books but many TL's are not given sufficient resourcing or training for a basic print collection let alone anything else.

Teacher-librarians have much to offer in supporting and supplementing the core role of our classroom teachers. A well organized library can save a school enormous amounts of money over time by maintaining systems that allow the utilization and accountability of a myriad of resources across the curriculum. I have been so frustrated over the years seeing the good intentions and budgets of teachers and principals dissipated over time because resource management systems were not maintained by staff with the appropriate qualifications.

Budgets over the last two decades have not kept pace with inflation and many TL's struggle to have resources to interest or inspire student readers. This becomes a vicious circle as staff and students come to expect little from their library and use it less and less and Principals divert even more funding and staffing from it to the more political immediacy of school testing and the like. In this day of information overload I would argue that the teacher-librarian's role is even more important in how we support the various literacy's of our students and teach them the information skills to navigate this brave new crowded world.

Personally, I see reading as a vital attribute for a healthy society. Reading allows people to experience other people's lives, worlds and other realities. It creates empathy and understanding and tolerance. It gives individuals independence in gaining knowledge. If we do not consider our schools as worthy places for libraries that give all students access to all these things we have missed the point of education.

Dianne Mayne B.A., Dip. Teach.. Dip. Ed(Teacher-Librarianship)