

Submission to the Federal Government Inquiry into Teacher Librarians in Schools

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I am a trained Teacher Librarian, with a Bachelor of Education Primary(Wollongong), and a Masters of Education (Teacher Librarianship) from CSU. I have been a teacher since 1977, and worked in Catholic primary school libraries since 1990. My role since April 2009 has included providing support to library staff within the diocese.

The majority of our Catholic primary schools in New South Wales no longer have Teacher Librarians in their school libraries, indeed many no longer even have a teacher working in the library. In many instances there is simply a School Support Officer (formerly called Teachers' Aides), most of whom have little or no Library training and/or experience. Principals are given staffing allocations, and many make their decisions regarding staffing according to budget restrictions. A School Support Officer costs less to employ than a teacher or a teacher librarian.

Students in our schools are therefore losing the opportunity to benefit in their learning from the broad experience of a qualified Teacher Librarian, who has the expertise to:

- Develop the library collection to appropriately support the targeted needs of the particular cohort of students.
- Coordinate the information literacy programme within the school to enable the students to become information literate – to be able to access, use and create information effectively.
- Teach the students the correct methods for acknowledging sources (bibliography) and so avoid plagiarism.

- Encourage the love of reading in the students through their broad knowledge of children's literature and what will appeal to their students.
- Assist in the improvement of student literacy levels through the provision of appropriate and relevant reading materials for teachers to use in literacy programmes.
- Aid and support the staff in the development of appropriate programmes for information technology, information literacy, research skills and literature enhancement.

School communities need the advantage of a qualified Teacher Librarian – someone who is not only a teacher but has taken a step further and is a qualified librarian, having studied information literacy and children's literature in depth, as well as the broader aspects of Library management and collection development. The qualified Teacher Librarian creates an effective learning environment in the library, so it becomes more than just a place to store books and resources. The library becomes a 'knowledge space' (Ross Todd 2003 <http://comminfo.rutgers.edu/~rtodd/archive.htm>), where the students come to translate the information into knowledge, through the work of the Teacher Librarian, who believes that all students can learn. The Teacher Librarian can make a difference in the teaching and learning in the school – empowering, engaging, exciting the students about reading and learning.

Recent research has proven that the achievement levels of students is higher in schools where there is qualified library staff. More than sixty studies in Canada, UK, USA and Australia have demonstrated that school libraries and their staff can have a very positive impact on the students' learning and literacy development.... "a strong library program that is adequately staffed, resourced and funded can lead to higher student achievement regardless of the socioeconomic or educational levels of the adults in the community." (Lonsdale, ACER, 2003) <http://www.det.wa.edu.au/education/cmisis/eval/library/value/val2.htm>

It is the responsibility of school principals and their leadership teams to provide the best for their students in terms of access to learning

materials, and so improve educational and community outcomes, particularly in literacy. Qualified Teacher Librarians have the potential to contribute to this end because they are specialists in encouraging literacy through the many programmes they develop in their libraries:

- Through free voluntary reading programmes within the school
- Support of the Premiers Reading Challenge in NSW, which encourages students to read more books
- Reading aloud to their students and encouraging classroom teachers to do the same (Aiden Chambers is an advocate of reading aloud to students and believes that no lesson should go by without the teacher reading at least something to the students – modeling is good teaching <http://www.aidanchambers.co.uk/readingenviro.htm>)
- Knowing what books to provide to excite and encourage the students to read, read, read...

While digital technology is becoming more prevalent, teacher librarians have the expertise to select and organize these materials in conjunction with printed materials – books are no longer just in print form, and in order to cater for the many and varied learning styles of the students in our schools, teacher librarians have access to e-books, audible books, online literature sites, databases etc, which can be catalogued for easy access. It is part of the role of the Teacher Librarian in Collection Development to include such items within the library collection. It is also the role of Teacher Librarians to continually update through professional development their role in curriculum resource provision so that teachers have the most recent resources at their fingertips.

Training of Teacher Librarians is an issue which needs to be addressed if there is to be an increase in the number of qualified Teacher Librarians for our schools. There are limited facilities available for access to study, but it is the enthusiasm and dedication of those who have undertaken the study to date who maintain and

extend the network of Teacher Librarians not only in NSW but throughout Australia. Unfortunately we are an aging population so there needs to be incentive for younger teachers to take up the mantle of information specialists as well as the many other wonderful roles played by the Teacher Librarians in our schools. It is a vital role which cannot be ousted merely for budgetary concerns.

The Federal Government is taking the initiative through this inquiry – it must then continue the ‘Education Revolution’ by providing adequate funding not only for buildings, but for provision of qualified staff to man these buildings; for professional development for principals and school administrators to be made aware of the value of an efficient library programme; and for training programmes for all library staff.

It is essential too that ...

‘...all levels of educational policy making (government or otherwise) must articulate their vision of quality library programs within schools so that all stakeholders know where they stand on supporting library programs in schools.’ (Kerry Neary, Cert. T., B.SC., Grad. Dip. TL, B.Ed, 2007)

<http://hubinfo.wordpress.com/action/library-advocacy-in-the-media/kerry-nearys-article-for-principals/>

"Whatever the cost of our libraries, the price is cheap compared to that of an ignorant nation." Walter Cronkite