

Inquiry into school libraries and teacher librarians in Australian schools

Submission by

Diane Ridley

Submission Number: 272

Date Received: 16/4/10



Terms of Reference and submission

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

A pilot scheme by the NSW Government to ‘increase school based decision making over recruitment, staffing mix and budget.’ has already impacted on teacher librarian positions. The pilot scheme allows schools to ‘cash in’ positions in the school. As the teacher librarian is above establishment in schools this position is a prime contender for replacement with cheaper staff (as done is Loftus Public School) such as school assistants. Allowing schools to replace a highly trained teacher librarian with untrained staff will impact on learning in the long term.

In recent history there has been no investment in secondary school libraries in NSW. The budget for secondary school libraries is at the mercy of individual school Principals & there is no specific policy or guidelines for funding for resources. As a result, there is an uneven provision of library resources in schools in NSW. The lack of direct support and funding by NSW DET of high school libraries and teacher librarians has had a detrimental effect on the status of the library and the profession.

There is another critical factor. Our local university, the University of Wollongong has an education faculty training primary and high school teachers. However, the school library and the teacher librarian are not mentioned during the course. Therefore newly trained teachers are not aware of the role of the teacher librarian in education and the value of resources available at the library. Newly trained teachers would find their integration into their role at the school greatly alleviated by the assistance a trained teacher librarian can give.

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

The promotion of reading & the love of reading are important in promoting literacy. Students also need to understand digital literacy. Students need to search the Internet to locate relevant and reliable resources. These skills need to be learnt by students and the teacher librarian is the ideal person to do so. Digital literacy is essential for the student to locate resources from the overwhelming number of unreviewed web sites available. It takes a high degree of knowledge to sort through the massive amount of digital information to locate relevant on the Internet.

The teacher librarian is also the ideal person to look after the large amount of hard copy resources in the school. School libraries hold a large amount of material and faculties have many text books for students to borrow. The school library is the ideal place to manage these resources. Resources can then be properly accounted for and located when required. Students are also accountable for these resources when borrowed. It takes skill and dedication to effectively manage the resources of the school. At Dapto High I manage a large amount (around 6,000) of textbooks for faculties alleviating them of the responsibility of lending, stock taking and housing.

A number of factors influence the role of teacher librarians in schools.

- i) The level of promotion and development of the position in schools by State Governments. Currently, policies of NSW DET are being used to remove the position of teacher librarian in schools.
- ii) The commitment of State Governments to adequately staff schools to prevent Principals from timetabling teacher librarian positions to alleviate timetable issues. Staffing in schools is set on the number of students but for high schools to attract students subject choice is increased and the teacher librarian is used to fill the timetable gap. Also, schools are left to manage their own computer systems with no period allocation so the teacher librarian is used to fill this gap. Many extra roles in the school are done voluntarily. Sometimes a period allocation is required to convince teachers to give up preparation time to do extra roles; again the teacher librarian is used to fill the gap.
- iii) The commitment of State Governments to actively keep teacher librarians above establishment & off school timetables. At present there is no commitment or will to do this.

3. The factors influencing recruitment and development of school librarians

There is a lack of understanding by DET of the important role the teacher librarian plays in actively promoting reading and Information Literacy in the school. DET has historically left it up to school Principals to define the role of the Teacher Librarian in school. The role of the teacher librarian is defined but this role is not actively supported by the Department. All too often the teacher librarian in primary schools is to provide relief for face-to-face teaching and the teaching of Information Literacy suffers as a result. All too often the teacher librarian in a high school is placed on the timetable even though the position is above establishment. This results in the teacher librarian not being available to teachers and students for research and assistance when required.

Under these circumstances it is understandable that the future for the profession does not bode well. Who would want to spend 5 years training for a profession that is not valued or may not exist?

Most teacher librarians train by completing a post graduate degree. The NSW DET makes it difficult for teacher librarians to professionally provide resources to the

school as no training is provided for the library database OASIS. This is left to local professional associations such as the Illawarra Schools Libraries Association. We provide a lot of professional development for local teacher librarian because NSW DET does not provide any.

Many teacher librarians are finding it difficult to attend the Associations professional development day and afternoons as Principals are refusing teacher librarians release time and/or are refusing to fund the professional development. At present the Association charges around \$50 for a full day conference, not a great cost.

I have also noticed there has been a significant increase in basic database enquiries on the NSW teacher librarian list serve. This would not occur if proper training were available.

The library database OASIS is also very old and outdated. This results in an increased clerical workload to maintain the database and deliver a 21st century resource. This is very difficult and time consuming with an outdated DOS based database.

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

Librarians in primary & high schools & Universities, have a role in ensuring the knowledge of students flows seamlessly from one institution to the next level. Time is required for teacher librarians to form links with each other.

Local high schools have been contacted by our local university (the University of Wollongong) as under graduates are beginning courses with underdeveloped Information Skills. The university is concerned and discussions between us have taken place. This is a direct result of the lack of policies by NSW DET.

Principals are reluctant to give release time to teacher librarians so their ability to have professional exchanges is limited. A teacher librarian is isolated professionally in schools as there is only one in each school. Therefore, the need to network and converse for professional development is important. There has been reluctance by principals to release and fund their teacher librarian to attend professional development days held by the Illawarra Schools Libraries Association. Our full day conferences cost around \$50, not a large cost.

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

Teacher Librarians have an important role to play in demonstrating and professionally develop technology to teachers. I play a central role in my high school by professionally developing teachers to use the NSW DET Portal, emails, the Interactive Whiteboard, Moodle and scanning to name a few. My role here has been helpful in preparing teachers to use digital resources and adjust to laptops in the classroom. If I was on the school timetable, I would not be available to fulfil this role.

The need for students to evaluate digital resources is vitally important. Teacher librarians have a direct role here. Research skills now encompass the digital world & this is a logical extension of the role of the Teacher Librarian. The vast amount of material available to students makes it imperative they have well developed Information Literacy skills and critical thinking skills. Students need to select and evaluate digital resources effectively to manage in the digital age. A teacher librarian is the expert here and is ideally placed to fulfil this role.

The age of the NSW DET library database OASIS is making it increasingly difficult to deliver resources to our school. The database was not designed to operate in the 21st century and deliver 21st century resources. It is unreliable and difficult to manipulate. It is very difficult to operate, manage and deliver resources to the school. We are expected to operate in a digital world with a DOS based database. The database needs to be updated so the role of the teacher librarian can be more effective in schools.

Libraries will still exist in the future. Books are still popular, whether they are in hard copy or digital format. Students will still need to develop Information Literacy skills. The amount of information out there makes this imperative for our future as a nation.

Diane Ridley B. Comm. (Econ). Dip. Ed. Masters Ed. (Teacher Librarianship)
Teacher Librarian Dapto High School
Secondary Rep Illawarra School Libraries Assoc.