

Submission for the *Inquiry into school libraries and teacher librarians in Australian schools*


Introduction

My name is Nicole Jackson and I am currently studying to achieve a Master of Education (Teacher Librarianship) through Charles Sturt University; having already gained a Bachelor of Education (Primary Education) in 2006. At present, I am studying part-time and am in my second year of the course. I have been working in the public education sector as a casual primary teacher (for the past 4 years) and as a casual teacher librarian for the past 18 months. My career goal is to eventually work in a primary school library as a teacher librarian. I am also a member and the current secretary of the Illawarra School Libraries Association (ISLA).

My submission is based on my knowledge and experiences as a Master of Education (Teacher Librarianship) student, as a casual teacher librarian and as a member of ISLA – living and working in the Wollongong region of NSW. I have chosen to address the term of reference": *The factors influencing recruitment and development of school librarians.*

The factors influencing recruitment and development of school librarians

Recruitment

 In NSW there is nothing specifically done to recruit teachers (casual or permanent) to the job of being a teacher librarian. There are huge recruitment drives for classroom teachers run by the NSW Department of Education and Training (DET), which often include information sessions at universities as well as advertisements in newspapers (such as the *Sydney Morning Herald*). Potential teacher librarians have to be proactive in finding out how to gain the (extra) qualifications – in most cases, a Master of Education degree – and then finding work in school libraries. Throughout my Bachelor of Teaching/Bachelor of Education (Primary Education) university studies, I never experienced an information


session, or even a lecture/tutorial, in the role of the teacher librarian in schools, something I think is absolutely disgraceful if education departments want teacher librarians in schools.

📖 Most teacher librarians “recruit themselves” to the job because of personal interest or experiences in school libraries – often coupled with a love and/or passion for reading! Personally, I loved my school library growing up (especially in primary school) and I knew that I wanted to be a teacher librarian – perhaps even more than I wanted to be a classroom teacher. I have volunteered in school libraries and also worked casually as a teacher librarian and this interest inspired me to take up the extra study so I could become a qualified teacher librarian.


📖 For me, one of the hardest things to have to accept has been the uncertainty of obtaining regular work (and, eventually, a full time position) as a teacher librarian. Even though I have been lucky enough to work casually as a teacher librarian, there is no guarantee of continuing or constant casual teacher librarian work, which is in contrast to that of teaching as a casual classroom teacher (where there is usually lots of work, if that’s what you want to do). Becoming a permanent teacher librarian at a school is difficult as there is only one per school and so you are potentially vying for one teacher’s position/job.


📖 While the NSW DET does offer a retraining program for classroom teachers to become teacher librarians, it can only be undertaken once a classroom teacher (who is not trained/qualified as a teacher librarian) has gained “permanent” employment as a teacher librarian (I say “permanent” as the position is considered temporary until completion of the retraining program). This program is run by Charles Sturt University and is a one year condensed version – paid for by the NSW DET – of the Master of Education (Teacher Librarianship) degree offered by the same university. However, these teacher librarians only graduate with a Graduate Diploma of Education (Teacher Librarianship), not a full Master of Education degree. This means that students like me, who are self-funding our study to gain a Masters degree, will be more qualified than some teacher librarians

employed by the NSW DET to work in public school libraries; and yet there is no guarantee I will be able to gain a position in a school library once I finish my higher qualification.


 Those teachers, who want to be teacher librarians, want to because of a love and passion for what it is that school libraries and teacher librarians can do for students, teachers and schools! Someone like me who is studying to become a teacher librarian, who has essentially recruited myself to undertake this extra study, who loves reading and want to share that passion with others...deserves better than what the current governments are doing to ensure that there is a qualified teacher librarian in every school – which in my opinion isn't much and is not enough! I want there to be a guaranteed teacher librarian position in all schools – for the benefit of students, teachers and the school community and also I want there to be a potential position for me to have the chance to be employed in.


Development

 In NSW, most professional development courses for teacher librarians are offered through the School Libraries and Information Literacy Unit; however there are only a small number of courses run each year. I think it is worth noting that at least the NSW DET is allowing for the provision of professional development for teacher librarians employed in public schools; something I know does not happen in every state in Australia.

 There are also many regional teacher librarian associations – such as ISLA – which are run by teacher librarians for teacher librarians (and school library assistants), and often these associations organise professional development days for teacher librarians in their region. Such associations are run by teacher librarians who volunteer their time, energy and expertise and are not paid for doing so. These teacher librarians organise and attend networking and planning meetings outside of school hours and work tirelessly to ensure that teacher librarians receive extra support and professional development – which is so

desperately needed. As there is (usually) only one teacher librarian in each school, often teacher librarians can feel isolated – professionally and personally. So the establishment and existence of teacher librarian associations help all teacher librarians feel like a part of a professional group who are definitely not alone!

 In primary schools many teacher librarians are used to provide Relief From Face to Face teaching (RFF) for classroom teachers. The professional development of primary school teacher librarians can be hampered by this provision of RFF as it can be difficult for teacher librarians to take a day away from their school (or schools, if they happen to be working in more than one – and often providing RFF in both!) to attend professional development courses as it can mean that classroom teachers will miss out on having their RFF. This is very disappointing as it is so vital that teacher librarians be able to attend professional development courses, just like classroom teachers, so that they can further develop their skills and knowledge in this profession.

 It can be quite difficult for casual teacher librarians (like me) to attend professional development courses (for teacher librarians), as it means a loss of a (potential) days work and an out-of-pocket cost to attend. While this situation is similar for all casual teachers (not just casual teacher librarians), it is something I believe should be addressed for any casual teacher librarians who wish to attend professional development courses. Perhaps professional development courses could be offered at a discounted rate for casual teacher librarians (who have to pay out of their own pocket to attend, rather than a school paying for them), which would encourage more casual teacher librarians to receive additional professional development while they are working casually and/or studying.

Conclusion

Teacher librarians are valuable, vital, essential members of school communities and I believe it is important that they are recognised as such – by their fellow colleagues, in school and local communities and by all levels of government.

As a teacher librarian in training, I hope by the time I become a qualified teacher librarian there are still teacher librarian positions available in NSW primary schools for which I can become permanently employed. I love working in school libraries and making a difference to the lives of students and teachers, doing a job that I think is incredibly worthwhile and rewarding.

I love books...I love information...I love libraries...and I love teacher librarians!!!



Submission by:

Mrs Nicole Jackson

Casual Teacher Librarian

Please note: This submission represents my own opinion and it does not necessarily represent the views held by teacher librarians or teachers who work in the schools I work in or the views of the teacher librarians who are part of the Illawarra School Libraries Teacher Association.