

Inquiry into school libraries and teacher librarians in Australian schools

Submission to Committee

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My Details

Name:- Judith Glaubitz

Occupation:- Teacher/ Librarian/ Literacy Support Person

System:- Catholic Primary Victoria

Experience:- 30 years/ 20 in Library

Schools:- Western Suburbs of Melbourne

I would like to address the 2nd term of reference: “The future potential of school libraries to contribute to improved educational and community outcomes, especially literacy.”

I have worked in the position of teacher/ librarian at my current school for the past 20 years. I have no formal library qualifications but have learnt the necessary skills “on the job” and through professional development opportunities. The school at which I am employed has 380 students. I have never been employed on a full-time basis. Until 2008, I was employed for 3 days a week. My employment is now 2 days.

Until last year, I worked as a teacher/ librarian. This part-time position required me to take lessons in the library in order to provide release time for 13 classroom teachers. During this time, I would develop the students’ love of literature and teach them appropriate research skills. During this time it was also necessary to allow the students to borrow items from the library, scanning in and out and helping students to locate appropriate resources. I was required to report on the students’ progress and behaviour in the library on the half- year and end of year reports.

The remainder of my time was spent in ordering new materials, processing these (cataloguing, covering, making displays etc), re-shelving returned items, sourcing requirements of teaching staff and generally keeping the library in good order. As it was impossible to achieve all of this alone, I enlisted the help of parents.

At lunchtimes, I provided opportunities for students to play chess and spend quiet time away from the hustle and bustle of the playground.

At the end of last year, I felt that I could no longer sustain the demands of this position and requested that I be given the opportunity to be “only” a librarian and not take classes as a release person. The only way that the school has been able to allow this, given the restrictions of funding, was for me to accept the position of literacy support person and library technician paid as a teacher aide.

During my time as teacher/ librarian, I have been chairperson of the Western Zone Librarians’ Network for a number of 2 year terms. From my involvement in this group, I know that my situation is not an isolated one. Positions in libraries are declining at a rapid rate. I believe that this is largely due to funds having to be stretched to the limit. Teachers must, according to the award, receive a certain amount of release time (and rightly so) and the only way that schools can do this is to have all hands on deck and everyone available in teaching roles.

I believe that a teacher/ librarian has a vital role within a primary school. They invariably have an enormous amount of knowledge about their own collections as well as books in general. They are very often skilled with new technologies and are open to learning for, and with, the students. They have the answers to queries about what is available in their library at their fingertips. They nurture the love of reading which is as important as the skill of learning how to read. They keep resources in order so that they are readily available and easily found. To allow resources to be bought and then allowed to be lost and unaccounted for seems to me to be an enormous waste of money.

In order for the position of teacher / librarian to continue within Catholic Primary schools, I believe that a commitment has to be made to funding the position specifically. Surely schools can be provided with this important role even if only on a pro rata basis. Librarians need to be allowed to do what they do best.

Should the current situation continue, I believe that there is no future potential for primary school libraries to contribute to improve educational and community outcomes, as librarians seem to be becoming a thing of the past and the very nature of libraries and their role in education is being undermined.