



Committee Secretary
Standing Committee on Education and Training
PO Box 6021
House of Representatives
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600
AUSTRALIA

14th April 2010

Re: House Standing Committee on Education and Training

Inquiry into school libraries and teacher librarians in Australian schools.

Dear Sir/madam

I wish to comment on the following Term of Reference:

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

My comments are based on personal experience and are intended to provide a part of the history of the current situation regarding staffing policy in school libraries. They are also intended to reflect the attitude of current thinking within school hierarchy in relation to funding of staff and resources of school libraries.

I was employed at Carine Primary School as a Teacher's Assistant from 1986 – 2003 during which time the school had an exceptionally talented Teacher Librarian. There were a number of part-time library officers employed to assist the teacher. On numerous occasions the headmaster would express the opinion that school libraries and books in particular belonged to a bygone era and would soon become obsolete.

Around the beginning of the year 2000, the West Australian Education department changed its policy from employing cleaners to using contractors. This left a significant number of cleaning staff without jobs. These staff were offered employment as Library Officers. They neither had the desire nor experience to work in that capacity but never-the-less took up the position.

At that same time, I was studying for a Bachelor of Science in Library Technology at Edith Cowan University and I also had done relief work in Carine Primary School library. When I approached the Education Department regarding an upcoming vacancy in the school library, I was told I could not cross awards! I had also completed a Teacher Assistants certificate at the time.

I left the school when I was offered a part-time Library Officers position at Mercy College Koondoola, a Catholic K – 12 school.

Teacher librarians were becoming nervous about staffing levels being cut around that time and I believe it is for this reason that they were not vocal enough in the shocking pay level of Library Officers. In the Catholic system and I believe originally in the Education Department, Library Officers apart from receiving extremely low hourly rate of pay, are also stood down eight weeks a year without pay. As I have worked both as a Teacher Assistant who is paid for all school holidays and a Library Officer who is only paid four weeks annual leave, stood down for eight, I can qualify the comment that it is ridiculous one is paid, the other stood down! There is no justification to do so.

Had Teacher Librarians been more active in pushing for better pay for Library Officers I believe the current situation in both government and private libraries would not be so prevalent. And that is, that Teacher Librarians are now being replaced by Library Officers. The powers that be have discovered for a fraction of the money libraries can now be run to the level of importance they feel the library commands.

From Mercy College I commenced employment as a Casual Library Officer and also took up what was a temporary position at a small Catholic Primary School in City Beach – Holy Spirit School.

The school employed a .4 FTE Teacher Librarian and a .4 FTE Library Officer. I worked with the Teacher Librarian for approximately 18 months before she left for full time work in a private girl's school library.

The headmistress offered me the position of running the library on my own over a total of three days (.6 FTE) so I negotiated the salary of a Teacher's Assistant - which put me on a better pay scale. I had been doing this position for 18 months when I was called in to the principal's office and told my hours would be cut back to .5 FTE in 2010. That was at the end of 2009.

I returned to school at the beginning of this year and was informed my duties had increased to include designing and maintaining the library web page and documenting a procedure manual.

The school built a new library in 2005 but was about to embark on another new library under the stimulus building program. This means I also have to pack up and move the current library on top of other duties which include the following; original cataloguing, SCIS downloads, administration of library budget, selection and processing of all library resources, teaching of library skills including use of OPAC, supervision of internet research, operation of issues desk, maintaining collection including weeding, maintaining teacher resource room, contributing to weekly newsletter, fundraising through book fare, displays including Bookweek, bulk loans, run reports, recommend websites to parents and staff, supervise students during library times and at lunch-time and general day to day running of school library.

The library budget for 2005 was approximately \$9,000 for resources plus the wages of a .4 FTE Teacher Librarian and .4 FTE Library Officer.

In 2009 the library budget was cut to less than \$5,000 and the wages were for a .6 FTE Teacher's Assistant.

In 2010 there is no library budget although \$1,000 was spent in first term on trying to replace missing stock. Wages to date are for a .5 FTE Teacher's assistant. There is no software support subscription as the system currently in use is obsolete.

Due to ridiculous expectations placed on me during term one and my request to have the position reinstated as .6 FTE denied due to lack of funds, I have handed in my notice and finish on the 28th April. (At the time of handing in my notice I felt by going back for two weeks after the April school holidays I could process the teachers' bulk loan requests plus teach my replacement the position, ensuring the library was up and running for term two.)

However, I have been informed I am not being replaced until the new library is finished. That the library is to be packed up by parents once I leave.

On a personal level, the staff are extremely upset that I am leaving. The students and parents, with the exception of the board, are not aware I am going. I have been asked to especially make sure I say goodbye to the autistic boy whom I enjoy a warm relationship with. As I do with all students.

Which brings me to the connection between the 'librarian', the books and the building. This connection is rapidly disappearing in school libraries as staffing is cut back.

As I continue to work in public libraries - which are still extremely popular amongst avid readers - I see that as valuable as they are; the staff do not have the time to recommend literature on a more in-depth level to patrons as frequently as school library staff do.

Yours sincerely

Bernadine Dellit