



Dear Madams & Sirs,

I write to as a very fortunate Teacher Librarian with a very supportive principal, who see the library as "the hub of the school". That makes all the difference.

Most of you probably had an old grey haired in a bun librarian near retirement when you were in school, telling you to "be quite in the library".

You need to get that stereotypical images out of your minds.

Personally I'm 38, colourful, loud, dramatic librarian who makes more noise than the kids. A dually qualified professional, who teachers over 22 lessons a week either 30 minutes or a hour long for 5-6 grades, professional develops staff in their information, technological learning, responsible for library resources, buying, maintain, circulating, disposing. Keeping up to date with the latest books - reading reviews, seeing booksellers, keeping eye out of good quality books that students will read. As well being the computer coordinator responsible for all technological issues in the school - the buying, maintenance, training and learning of staff and students.

I am lucky to actually have a lunch break, I pour myself a up of coffee around 8.30am by 11am nearly every day I pour out a cold barely drank cup. Its hard to take a break when staff and students came in so they borrow books (I let my students borrow when ever they like - fostering a "love of reading"), find information - have a chat - they library remains accessible to all.

My rational is a library should be a vibrate , exciting, up to date place of not only learning but also of leisure.

A place kids feel comfortable to ask questions, to explore their taste in reading, learn to appropriately, quickly & efficiently find information. As quoted by one of my students "Miss the library is COOL" Fostering a "Love of Reading & Learning"

What I find most disheartening is the working conditions of many of my fellow Teacher - Librarians. In buildings that are falling apart.... no air-conditioners, dodgy tables, Disappearing budgets, unsupportive principals, in some high school settings having to supervise over 120 students, in a building with all sort of hiding places. Clerical time constantly reduce although work load dramatically increased - Audio-Visual recordings, Laptops assistance etc.

From a personal perspective , late last year I accepted a position as a Teacher-Librarian to be closer to home (currently travel over 45 minute one way) . I went to visit the school as a meet and greet/ hand over day.

The school had not had a properly trained librarian in over 5 years.

There were serious OHS issues - Shelves had tables shoved against them (students needed to climb on tables to reach) DUST that was so thick that it was visible.

Parts of the office was kept together with a metal brace to keep the ceiling and wall together.

The person they had a retired teacher NOT LIBRARY trained who kept on telling me that he was only a casual on a 5 week term - that being the case for 2 1/2 years, had no idea about cataloguing books he told me he did the best he could . Result a MESS - picture books with chapters books, no really understanding of books kids should be reading.

The most was the smell.... as soon as he opened the library door I asked what was that smell - told from the carpet - due to constant ceiling leaks (thousands of dollars have been spent on patching the problem, industrial heater/dryers tried but no luck. By the end of the day I was overcome by the nauseating smell - consequently ended up at a allergy specialist - who was disgusted at the thought of asthmatic staff & students using the library.

I spent an agonising weekend trying to decided what to do.... spoke to staffing officers on my legal rights - told I only need to write a letter of decline to staff. I thought I better be polite and notify the principal of my decision - were I was rudely told "if its about the bloody carpet I will rip it out, its been a problem since 1974" He ended up writing a letter to the Minister of Education and the Director General of Education complaining that I declined the position. My current principal was more than happy for me to retain my position as he did not wish to lose me. I could not work in those conditions were my health was affected after 1 day, did not want to think what it would end up like long term.

If that school was an example of that over the years I have spoken, seen and read about from my fellow teacher-librarian then its a wonder how many still turn up to school every day. But mainly its for our students that we do, that excitement of introducing them to a world of books opening their imaginations to different time and places, people and events. Spending own lunch break to help with research, finding books on their interest dogs, cooking, sports, arts whatever.

What we do: Being a teacher in assisting their learning being a librarian to introduce them to the world via books, information.

Replacing Teacher-Librarian with unqualified staff or not at all does not help produce a society to values reading and books opening their imaginations to endless possibilities, nor does it produce citizens who can quickly and efficiently search of information (kids might use technology mainly for games but ask them to find information, decide what is quality, appropriate information then you see what is lacking) . Classroom teachers have far too much other demands to give students that they need to become readers and information savvy individuals. But as Teacher _librarians we can, do this and much much more.... if more of us had proper budgets, clerical assistance, team teaching with classroom teacher rather than being the release from face to face teaching (RFF) person, imagine what we can do for our students future voting, tax paying adults of our society.

Thanks for taking the time into looking at our issue
Mary Nikolakopoulos