

Inquiry Into School Libraries and Teacher-Librarians in Australian Schools

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My Background and Current Situation

I write as a fully qualified teacher and teacher librarian. I have worked in my current school for some 15 years, 10 as a classroom teacher and 5 to date as the school's teacher librarian. My school is a primary school with approximately 400 students in 16 classes.

As well as fulfilling the roles of a teacher librarian to the best of my ability, I undertake significant other duties within the organization of the school. I am involved with the school Literacy Committee and have in the past spearheaded the work of the Committee, as well as being part of the school Technology committee. I co organize the Student Council which undertakes fund raising activities for various charities; I co ordinate all Scholastic Book Club activities within the school; I am the contact person for visiting performances to the school; I co ordinate the Home Reading Scheme, making purchases for the Scheme, ensuring that old titles are removed from the Scheme, new titles allocated to class sets and student record folders are compiled as needed; I promote, organize and ensure recognition of student participation in the Premier's Reading Challenge which now has a participation rate of over 50% of the student population. All of these duties are completed with very little assistance from the school staff and are frequently completed outside of school hours due to the lack of available time during the course of the school day.

I am on site at the school 5 days a week, where I am timetabled to provide library sessions to all classes for approximately 1 hour per week. For the most part, these sessions are used as part of each classroom teacher's release from face to face (RFF) allocation. In the recent past the timetable for these sessions has been developed without any consultation with me, which has lead to significant difficulties in completing the library programs. I have also found that class teachers, for the most part, have little understanding of the role of a teacher librarian, or the concept of collaborative planning, being often more concerned with the idea of being certain of their RFF time and showing little interest in what their students do in library sessions. Since taking over the role of teacher librarian, I have tried many times to improve this situation but in many ways staff remain unwilling to be more involved, or to make time to work more collaboratively.

Difficulties also have arisen over the question of library funding. National library guidelines indicate that a school library should cull 10% of its collection each year, and have at least 1 new item purchased per student per year. At an average book price of, for example, \$15.00 for just a paperback title, the budget for my school library would need to run to a sum of around \$6 000.00 per year. Such a sum for a school of this size is clearly inadequate as it allows little for the add on costs of library items, such as covering materials, barcodes (which have to be purchased by the school), appropriate housing for items and so on. Also items such as reference books, teaching materials any item costing more than \$15 has to be carefully weighed against need. In addition, I have often found just being told what the library budget actually is, to be a troublesome question in the recent past, only after many requests for budgetary figures to be passed on, have I actually known how much funding the library has been allocated. Sadly, this has, at times, resulted in the bulk of the library funding already being allocated when only a few items have been purchased. The lack of information provided creates great difficulty in the appropriate selection of new library material.

I have the constant concern that I am fulfilling my role adequately, continually seeking ways to improve my skills and knowledge as a teacher librarian, but it is a frequent frustration that I feel my role and status is undervalued and goes unrecognized by the school community at large.

Points Relevant to Inquiry's Terms of Reference

Point 1: Impact of Recent Policies and Investments

- the current building of many new school libraries under the Federal Government's stimulus package can be seen as highlighting the significance of school libraries, however, if after spending millions of dollars on new buildings, the appropriate and adequate staffing and resourcing of these libraries is not addressed, many could result in becoming 'white elephants' because their use and potential is being undervalued, even ignored. A new building is just that a new building: it does not automatically mean that student outcomes and achievements will be improved
- the removal of tied funding to school libraries has resulted in negative effects on collection development for example, the removal of a yearly grant of some \$800.00 per library some years ago. This grant was tied specifically to the purchase of Australian material and was often used for items that would have normally been considered out of the range of the normal library budget. Thus, while the majority of teacher librarians make it a policy to focus purchases on Australian material, the removal of such tied grants has made this process more difficult
- Federal government funding for all students to have computer access, via the supply of a Notebook to every Year 9 student (in NSW) while this may give all students equal access to computing power, students still need explicit instruction in the use of applications and the Internet the teacher librarian provides significant support and aid in learning to navigate the internet and of course, it is expected that students have substantial skills by Year 9 level as they have already had several years of instruction up until that time. For the student who does not have a computer or Internet access at home, then the school library and the teacher librarian can provide that learning environment
- the removal of Library Consultants and support by Education Departments, can leave many teacher librarians trying to make their own way in dealing with difficulties without the back up of higher authorities this could be interpreted as showing that school libraries and teacher librarians are seen as relatively unimportant and not needing of departmental support a contradiction given the amount of capital that is invested in school libraries
- Premier's Reading Challenge while seen as a great success at a departmental level due to the number of students participating, this success would not be nearly as great without the teacher librarians who promote the Challenge, via actions such as placing Challenge list titles in a prominent, designated area of a library; by labeling Challenge titles to show their level and book identification number; by publicly recognizing the efforts of students who participate; and by organizing incentives for participation.
- the development and implementation of the MySchool website, where NAPLAN results are used as a measure of school performance, but nowhere does it incorporate data re school libraries not the size of the collection or its quality, nor the amount of time a teacher librarian is on site at the school, or how their time is used; and yet, national and international studies have shown time and time again that significant contribution to the improvement of student outcomes is evident where there is qualified and sufficient library staff managing the library collection and working with staff and students
- the draft Australian Curriculum has at its core literacy, numeracy, ICT, thinking skills, creativity, self management, teamwork, intercultural understanding, ethical behaviour and social competence all of which are within the expertise and experience of qualified teacher librarians

Point 2: Future Potential of School Libraries and Librarians to Contribute of Improved Educational and Community Outcomes

- by nature of their training and role within a school, teacher librarian's knowledge of the whole curriculum directly influences the selection of the most appropriate resources to improve student outcomes
- teacher librarians have the ability and position to liaise with the wider community via literacy programs, book recommendations, parent information needs re appropriate titles a teacher librarian's wide knowledge of children's literature places them well to provide answers
- all teacher, especially in primary schools, are teachers of reading teacher librarians have the added role of developing and encouraging the love of reading teacher librarians are expressly concerned with sustained reading: the development of reading not just as an educational tool but as a recreation as well. Sustained reading is increasingly important in developing student's overall literacy, given that we live in an information environment with a massive amount of information to be processed on a daily basis. Students are being required to deal with increasing quantities and varieties of material efficient and effective strategies must be taught to deal with this vast overload. It is also

evident that students who undertake sustained reading, especially as a recreational activity, become better readers, spellers and writers themselves.

- students need guidance and explicit teaching to effectively use new material and technologies use of the internet for example is not the be all and end all in the wrong hands, without the skills to evaluate, analyze and synthesize information found, the internet is a misleading and misunderstood place. It is feasible that schools can breach duty of care requirements where a qualified teacher librarian is not at hand to teach students safe and ethical use of the internet.
- students need a range of life skills where they are able to solve problems using a variety of strategies for example, if the cash register breaks down, how many shop assistants will be able to correctly add up a shopping bill and give the correct change; when there is a power black out so that computers are unavailable, how many students will be able to pick up an information book to continue their research so that time and opportunity are not lost? The skills a teacher librarian can develop in students can allow students to reach their goals using alternate resources when the need arises
- teacher librarians are information literacy specialists who can design, and assist teachers to design, programs to teach students effective, efficient and appropriate use of technologies. Programs that include the critical reading of print, graphics, video and all learning objects to build knowledge, as well as the ethical and responsible use of technologies such as the internet and all its facets
- for some students, personal issues can hold back their progress a library can be the only place in a school where students enjoy a level playing field where resources are plentiful and have been selected to benefit all students not a select few

Point 3: Factors Influencing Recruitment and Development of School Librarians

- there is a lack of recognition at Departmental level for the position of teacher librarian as a teacher who holds a dual qualification. In NSW, personnel profiles class teacher librarians as 'teacher' with no mention of the librarian role
- there is a lack of information and focus on the role and work of teacher librarians within teacher training at tertiary institutions. Trainee teachers are basically told nothing of a teacher librarian's work, thereby completing their training and then being placed in a school with no knowledge of the support and assistance a teacher librarian can offer
- vast majority of classroom teachers see teacher librarians in a negative light sometimes as someone who has little to offer, or who is a 'refugee' from the classroom classroom teachers, even principals, do not see the value of a qualified teacher librarian, working under a belief that a teacher librarian is merely 'the keeper of the books'
- teacher librarians are often ignored for their contribution to student progress this could be as simple as a student's reading ability showing marked improvement, where the class teacher and parent sees that the class reading program has really worked for that student. The possibility that the expertise and knowledge held by the teacher librarian which was used to recommend appropriate reading material to the student, thereby enhancing the student's progress would be easily overlooked.
- there exists a general perception in many quarters that the person in the school library is a librarian not a teacher and therefore is not really part of the school
- those seeking to train as teacher librarians find that they have limited options the number of tertiary institutions offering training in teacher librarianship has dwindled immensely. In addition, courses have to be self funded by the teacher meaning economic considerations as to whether 'will the course be worth it?' Also, such courses are basically now all Masters level which means a significant time investment as well so again applicants would be asking the question as to whether the course is actually worth the effort?
- in NSW, the appointment of a teacher librarian hinges on the number of students in a school many teacher librarian positions are part time, and are often filled by relief staff who are often untrained. Where a full time teacher wishes to undertake the role of teacher librarian, the number of full time places is low so that there are few opportunities for an appointment
- it is unusual for executive positions to be held by teacher librarians for teachers who wish to pursue executive status, working in a teacher librarian capacity can be seen as not being really serious about executive aspirations
- the use of teacher librarians as part of the RFF staffing allocation in many instances, classroom teachers are not very concerned with just how library sessions are used and what work is undertaken library is simply part of their RFF time and they, the class teacher, don't have to think about what is being done with their students. Also, it is often the case that staff who provide the RFF sessions are not included in the assessment of students, nor are they included in stage meetings re student programs and outcomes, nor is there any expectation to plan the content and outcome of any work undertaken in RFF sessions

- due to the lack of knowledge held by classroom teachers and principals as to the role, the skills and training of a teacher librarian, there is often a lack of interest in, or expectation for class teachers and teacher librarians to work collaboratively together. There needs to be a greater and more explicit clarification of the role of the teacher librarian in a school
- there is an argument for teacher librarians to be included as unofficial members of a school's executive team teacher librarians tend to be the only staff member who works with every student, across all levels, and has a whole school knowledge of curriculum their wider knowledge and expertise can be invaluable in determining the direction of whole school programs and targets
- while most school staff would agree that a school library does need someone in charge of it, many school libraries are managed by untrained teacher librarians educational qualifications may be held but the qualifications relevant to managing a library effectively are not so why have a dually qualified person when a school community is prepared to accept the unqualified person? This really is a bit like taking a sick animal to your GP while the GP is trained in medicine, he/she will hardly treat a sick animal as they are not trained for that role. The school library without a qualified teacher librarian is simply short changing the staff and students as the essential skills of selecting the best resources and the skills of information literacy teaching are missing.
- teacher librarians are entitled to have allocated library management time while there is a recommended allocation, this is at the principal's discretion rather than being a mandatory allocation. This can have serious consequences where a principal does not value the library or the teacher librarian it is not unknown for virtually no library management time to be given, resulting in the teacher librarian being hard pressed to maintain effective and efficient library operations. It is also a professional discourtesy for this time allocation to not be negotiated between a teacher librarian and a principal, as it is feasible that in varying circumstances, the time allocation may need alteration
- in addition to an allocation of management time, libraries need allocated clerical aide time. This is often changed at the will of senior clerical staff and/or the school principal, without due thought or consultation with the teacher librarian. Except in emergency situations, clerical staff are vital to the smooth running of library operations, as clerical staff can take over responsibility for many of the administrative tasks in the library, leaving the teacher librarian to be able to focus on more important issues of teaching and student learning. Lack of clerical aide will deter potential teacher librarians as they would see the teaching part of the role to be subordinate to the librarian part of the role
- all KLA's (key learning areas) have their own syllabus document which clearly sets out the expectations of student achievement at particular stages classroom teachers therefore know exactly what is required of their teaching programs. No such document exists for library programs information skills are embedded in all syllabuses but often remain unnoticed or hidden as the document does not highlight them to indicate where teacher librarians can be of most support. There is a distinct need for a library program syllabus or at least a clearly laid out program that provides a definitive guide for library programs
- in the current economic and educational environments, all teacher professional development must be cost effective as such, teachers are normally asked to nominate areas of professional need for their own professional learning. While some development courses are structured for teacher librarians, there is only a small amount available compared to other curriculum areas. Additionally, even though teacher librarians are dealing with the outcomes and resources pertinent to all curriculum areas, teacher librarians are often not considered for professional development outside of their field. For a teacher or teacher librarian wishing to maintain their knowledge and skills relevant to all teaching areas, access to appropriate professional development should not be discouraged or denied

Point 4: Role of Different Levels of Government

- at either federal or state level, provision of dedicated funding to resource school libraries with appropriately trained staff and appropriate resources
- to provide for increased avenues of gaining teacher librarian qualifications and to make those avenues easier to access
- to provide for full recognition of teacher librarians in terms of their position and relevance to school curriculums
- to provide departmental support in terms of library consultants and professional development courses, as well as support for teacher librarian networks
- to ensure equality of funding between public and private school libraries, and indeed for equality in funding for whole schools
- to consult with teacher librarians re the design of new libraries so that space is used to its maximum potential and adequate space is available for all library features
- to ensure that school principals and staff are fully aware of the role of a teacher librarian, the training of a teacher

- librarian and to clarify the expectations of teacher-librarians and classroom teachers to work collaboratively together
- to ensure that school libraries are adequately staffed by qualified teacher-librarians, especially in light of programs such as the federal government's focus on student ICT skills and use - given the amount of money being directed towards this focus, student skills will not develop by chance, by some sort of osmosis, nor will positive, productive, and ethical skills and use eventuate without the explicit teaching of skills, best delivered by the appropriately qualified person
- to remove the requirement that library sessions are part of a classroom teacher's RFF allocation - so that collaborative teaching and assessment can be used as a major means to improve student outcomes
- to not just recommend the allocation of a suggested amount of time for library management but to mandate the allocation of a definite time amount, regardless of the total time a teacher-librarian is on hand
- to ensure that written policy and actual practice do not diverge - illustrated by recent events at Loftus Public School, which to all intents and purposes does not currently have a teacher-librarian, even while a new library is being constructed under the federal government's stimulus package. This situation is in direct contrast to the NSW Library Policy which clearly states the importance of school libraries and the role of the teacher-librarian in the development of educational programs
- to develop a set of national library standards, as well as a national information literacy curriculum
- to collect relevant data re school libraries and teacher-librarians as part of the MySchool website to give more comprehensive information about Australian schools
- to make the role and contribution to student outcomes that a qualified teacher-librarian can make very visible in the new Australian national curriculum

Point 5: Impact and Potential of Digital Technologies

- the rise of digital technologies sees an increased need for access to professional development that is easily accessed, and of relevance to student outcomes
- school libraries need to have access to up-to-date digital resources and to have them appropriately maintained and monitored
- as technology becomes increasingly specialized and sophisticated, capable of more uses than ever before - the need for qualified personnel has also risen, personnel who are able to help ensure the most effective and efficient use of the technology
- some hold a belief that internet access is enough - teacher-librarians, and maybe even libraries themselves, are no longer needed. However, it needs to be remembered that the internet does not teach students to manage the overabundance of information that can be found; to analyze, select, locate and synthesize required and appropriate information; to evaluate and verify information found; to search effectively in minimum time; to comprehend and collect information; to support students in safe internet use. No the internet can't do these things - but a teacher-librarian can. It has to be remembered that the internet is huge with billions of pages -it has very little quality control- it is a constantly changing environment as web pages come and go - it has a lot of inaccurate and misleading information, including much undesirable information - wading through this ocean of material can be daunting for the most experienced at times, let alone the inexperienced novice.

In conclusion - in a perfect world, every school regardless of size would have a full-time qualified teacher-librarian, a well-resourced library in terms of an appropriate learning environment and a high quality collection, teacher-librarians would be valued by school communities for their dual qualifications, their commitment and dedication, and for their leadership in curriculum change and use of technology.