



To: Secretary, Australian Parliament House of
Representatives Standing Committee on Education and
Training

INQUIRY INTO SCHOOL LIBRARIES AND TEACHER- LIBRARIANS IN AUSTRALIAN SCHOOLS

This is a personal submission. I write as someone who has been a part-time primary teacher-librarian in systemic catholic schools in the inner west of Sydney for the past 11 years. My initial training was as a teacher and I have a first class honours degree in education from the University of Sydney. After teaching for a few years in the western suburbs, I first took up a position as a teacher-librarian in the mid 1970s in the public system, and received, if my memory serves me right, six weeks initial training then. Up until 1999, when I returned to teacher-librarianship, I had worked variously in educational publishing, as an academic (in teacher education) and as an educational consultant with the NSW Department of Education. My speciality areas have always been reading, children's literature and then other aspects of the teaching of English.

I think the best way I can make a submission, given the number of organisational submissions you will receive, is to address some of the terms of reference in relation to my day to day work.

The factors influencing recruitment and development of school libraries

Teacher first, librarian second

For years the emphasis in many schools, for instance in those in the NSW Catholic system, has been on having *a trained teacher in the library: library qualifications have been seen as an added extra, rather than a necessity*. This is because the main role is that of teaching. I work in a small primary school with less than 200 students and my system allocates funding of one day a week for every 100 students, so I must get all my work done in two days. I spend three quarters of my time in face-to-face teaching, K-6. This time is 'cooperatively' planned and taught with the classroom teacher and because the curriculum is so crowded, the lessons 'piggyback' upon another Key Learning Area, most often HSIE. The lessons are regarded as essential to the development of content and skills in this KLA, not an added extra.

The other quarter of my time is spent in one of three ways:

- developing and maintaining library resources according to the needs of teachers and students
- additional teaching as requested (e.g. for the last term, assisting a small group of Year 3 students with reading instructional needs for $\frac{3}{4}$ hour each day)

- attending to issues with the school's computer LAN. Like many teacher – librarians, I have been given this responsibility.

I shall return to the nature of my work in addressing other terms of reference. At this point I would simply state that the replacement of teacher –librarians by librarians or library technicians would be a retrograde step.

Education/training options for teacher –librarians

As I stated earlier, I have no formal T/L qualifications. This is heresy to my good friends in organisations like ASLA, but I believe they are not taking into account the range of employment options for teacher –librarians some. For part-time teacher –librarians there is little incentive, especially as additional qualifications will not change our pay or promotional status.

This is not to say that I would not have liked to undertake more education in my role, but I would prefer there to be more 'lower level' options, such as Graduate Diploma or even discrete Graduate Certificate options. A heavy and very theoretically-based masters degree may be fine for someone who wishes to ultimately lead a large secondary school library team, or to be able to work as a Librarian outside of the school system, but for those in small to medium –sized primary schools it is overkill.

I would recommend that universities offering external T/L qualifications be encouraged to re-introduce relevant Graduate Certificate and Diploma courses. Another option is a T/L elective in the final year of the undergraduate teaching degree, to be followed by another 6 months of external study if necessary.

Additionally, whilst teachers are fairly well catered for with professional development (PD) day courses or mini-certificate courses, to add to their knowledge and to keep up to date with new pedagogy, teacher –librarians are rarely afforded this option. Budgets in small primary schools don't run to funding this PD. Any conferences or PD days I have attended have been self-funded, and often they have been on my non-working days. When you are in a school for only two, or even three days a week, you feel guilty about letting down three or four classes by not being there.

Aging cohort

Almost all of my peers in the Catholic Primary Teacher –Librarians' Association (CPTLA) are in their fifties or early sixties. I intended to retire this year but was talked out of it for another year by my principal. The experience and knowledge that my colleagues and I bring to education needs to be replaced by a new cohort who see the job as valuable and worthwhile. This means greater support, particularly from public and catholic systemic authorities, which have tended to take the role for granted.

Minimum employment needed for staffing a school library

Every school needs a library. A well-stocked library in a primary school is the second most important factor, besides quality literacy teaching, for the encouragement of reading. However it takes time and expertise to stock and run a library. I work from 8.20 to 6.45 on both my days in order to maintain my library. I have no clerical assistance, and so, on top of after-school staff or committee meetings, every week I bring home books for stamping, repairing, and other tasks. I shop for books in my own time, especially for cheaper copies of the many series books which are essential to the Year 1 to 4 students who are voracious borrowers of short chapter books that feed their developing reading skills.

My 'administration time' is in short broken periods between teaching classes, and is often taken up by other issues and requests from staff or the principal. I do not begrudge these requests, especially if they are related to resourcing teachers, but it does mean that I leave most of my book processing until after school.

In some Catholic dioceses, such as Parramatta, no school, even a small one, gets a teacher-librarian entitlement of less than three days. I think this is realistic: in my own situation I would have two days for teaching and one for all the tasks related to keeping my library up to scratch.

The future potential of school libraries and libraries to contribute to improved educational and community outcomes, especially literacy

I think there are two aspects to this: voluntary reading and 'information literacy'.

Voluntary reading

Teacher-librarians are in the best position of anybody to encourage every child in a primary school to read for pleasure and to want to do so. Without boasting, I believe that I achieve this very well for about 85% of my 145 students. Those students for whom I don't achieve this goal are boys in Years 5 and 6 who find reading less compelling than the joys of the Internet. I am supported by a school that 'requires' students in Years 3 to 6 to have a book under their desks for independent reading during the week. But most of my students love to read, because I go out of my way to provide them with the books they want, which is largely possible, even on the very meagre budget I have. My most avid readers also access the local municipal library, but given the working lives of most parents and the fact that, after school, children are either in out-of-hours care or at some after-school class or activity, the school library is their main source of reading materials.

I am an outgoing person and show my enthusiasm for books, but my best advertisement for reading is the word of mouth of my readers, who are encouraged by myself and the other teachers to talk about what they read.

As a teacher, I know a great deal about literacy and its development, and as a librarian, I know a lot about children's literature and current trends in its publishing, so am in a unique position in the school to encourage the

independent reading 'practice' that adds to and maintains students' reading skills. It is for this reason that I am affectionately known as 'Mrs. Books'!

Information Literacy

It is my responsibility to bring an information literacy perspective to lessons in the library. This begins in Kindergarten with an understanding of non-fiction books and their role, through to sequential teaching through the grades of specific strategies such as mind mapping, the use of compare/contrast charts, finding keywords and note taking. Planning with the classroom teacher is done after school or during breaks and then one of us takes responsibility for planning the lesson or sequence of lessons. Students in Year 6 leave the school knowing how to correctly construct a bibliography to show what resources they have used.

Since around 2005 our library has had a bank of 14 desktop computers and we utilise the 'myinternet' intranet, so from Year 1 students are used to using computers as well as books for their 'research'. This does create some additional but worthwhile seeking out of appropriate resources and using them to create 'properties' for the students to access safely. Part of my role has been to draw up the 'acceptable usage' policy for students and to monitor internet access. In the middle and upper primary class lessons I am responsible for developing the students' understanding of issues such as internet etiquette, plagiarism, and how to judge whether sites provide authoritative information.

Of course, the internet is only one source of information. Books are still invaluable, and I ensure that students access current book resources appropriate to their reading level for any research question they are addressing. Over the last few years, I have been able to build a good bank of book resources for each of the HSIE or Science & Technology units we implement. The problem now is to refresh these resources with more recently published books: this is limited by very restricted budget, as the library competes more and more with the costs of technology. The replacement of computers and the purchase of Smartboards tend to have preference.

Involvement in the school's development of literary resources

Many primary school teacher-librarians are involved in the accessioning, organisation and circulation of the school's literacy teaching materials, particularly packs of books for guided reading and individual home readers for children to take home in the early years of literacy learning. This has been the case in the schools I have worked in. It means that books are not lost or dispersed and that money raised by the P & F for their purchase is not wasted and seen not to be wasted. Once again, skills both as a teacher and as a librarian are essential for this involvement. I am pleased that after some years of lobbying the P&F last year allocated \$4000 to the purchasing of new home readers. I coordinated their purchase, arranged appointments with booksellers and

relieved classroom teachers of their classes to allow them to select appropriately levelled texts. I did all the accessioning over the Christmas break and passed the books on to a wonderful parent 'coverer'. Most of the books were ready for use at the beginning of Term 1 this year, and parents and students are delighted to be reading new books instead of the ragged, out of date ones they had previously were taking home.

The impact and potential of digital technologies to enhance and support the role of school libraries and librarians

I have addressed this point in part already. Increasingly schools are making use of new technologies, particularly for accessing information. This enhances learning, provided the technology is used wisely. Like any good teacher-librarian, I maintain and update my ICT skills on the job, and spend a good deal of time in such tasks as:

- selecting appropriate websites and learning objects, particularly those with some interactive components
- maintaining and installing appropriate software
- maintaining access by students and teachers to the intranet: including password maintenance and creation, and filtering/banning of inappropriate sites
- investigating problems with the hardware and logging those that don't fit the 'when in doubt switch it out' strategy to our contracted technician, who visits once a fortnight and with whom I liaise.

I don't think this aspect of the teacher-librarian's role was so prominent when staffing ratios were last determined. It is very time-consuming: I can do a lot of intranet work and site selection from home, but only because I am a part-time worker with an understanding husband!

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

Investment in school libraries is a matter for the Federal and State Governments, the Catholic education system, its diocesan offices, and the school principal. Whilst many school libraries will be physically improved as a result of the BER, others, like mine, will still have peeling paint, rusting shelve joints and fraying carpet. I do believe that the prominence of the school library that Australians experienced in the 1970s and 1980s no longer exists. In the Sydney diocese, we have no-one leading school library development: it seems to be up to the individual principal to decide what happens. My principal is very supportive professionally, but not financially. Money is always a problem in small schools like ours. Currently I operate with a total budget of \$4000 a year. This is always spent by midyear and after that purchases come out of my own pocket.

I would love to see additional funding from the Commonwealth government, although I believe it should be targeted where it is most needed.

Thank you for reading my submission. I love my work. I believe I make a difference. I am fearful that uninformed principals will devolve or replace the role of teacher-librarian to that of resource teacher (implying ICT teacher) or a librarian or library technician, largely as a money-saving measure. This would be tragic for the future of education. Good teacher-librarians are vital to the
ing in primary schools.