



A response from the NSW/ACT Independent Education Union to the House Standing Committee on Education and Training.

Inquiry into school libraries and teacher librarians in Australian Schools.

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NSW/ACT Independent Education Union
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Submission by the NSW/ACT Independent Education Union to the Inquiry into school libraries and teacher librarians in Australian schools

Introduction

The NSW/ACT Independent Education Union (IEU) appreciates the opportunity to respond to the Inquiry into school libraries and teacher librarians in Australian schools.

The NSW/ACT Independent Education Union (IEU) represents a current membership of approximately 28,000 members within NSW and the ACT in 1,267 primary and secondary schools, along with early childhood centre and private post compulsory colleges.

The IEU has a known and understood mandate under its Constitution to advance and defend the industrial and professional rights and interests of teachers and support staff in the non - government sector.

The author Ann-Maree McEwan qualified through Macquarie University as a secondary teacher librarian. She had extensive experience in primary, secondary and central school libraries with the NSW Department of Education and the Catholic Education Office, Sydney. Her current position is as an organiser with the NSW/ACT Independent Education Union (IEU). She advises teacher librarian members on industrial matters.

Teacher librarians are important educators within a school and, assisted by library support staff, make a significant direct and indirect contribution to resourcing and delivering mandatory curricula, improving student learning outcomes and helping students to access quality developmentally appropriate research sources and information.

Teacher librarians support and implement the vision of their school communities through advocating and building effective library and information services and programs that contribute to the development of lifelong learners. A teacher librarian holds recognised teaching qualifications and qualifications in librarianship, defined as eligibility for Associate (i.e. professional) membership for the Australian Library and Information Association [ALIA]. Within the broad fields of education and librarianship, teacher librarians are uniquely qualified. This is valuable because curriculum knowledge and pedagogy are combined with library and information management knowledge and skills. [1]

The educational impact of a teacher librarian on learning outcomes for students through the provision of access to high quality and appropriate digital and non digital resources both for students and teachers is significant and well documented.

The educational impact of developing and mapping digital and information literacy skills in students and teachers is significant and well documented.

The educational impact of a teacher librarian inspiring a life long love of reading and learning in their students is significant and widely acknowledged.

Terms of reference

To inquire into and report on the role, adequacy and resourcing of school libraries and teacher librarians in Australia's public and private schools.

This submission addresses the following terms of reference for the committee's focus: -

- Terms of Reference 1: The impact of recent policies and investments on school libraries and their activities.
- Terms of Reference 2: The future potential of school libraries and librarians to improve educational and community outcomes, especially literacy.
- Terms of Reference 3: The factors influencing recruitment and development of school librarians

Terms of Reference 1: The impact of recent policies and investments on school libraries and their activities.

The substantial investment committed by the Rudd Government through the Digital Revolution and grants for the building or upgrading of many school libraries in the Catholic and independent sectors is welcomed by school communities and teacher librarians. New improved facilities and physical environments will enhance schools for all users and improve learning through advances such as access to wireless Internet. The fact that many libraries are in the process of being built indicates the value school communities place on libraries.

However, the impact of recent policies and investments on school libraries has been limited in some school libraries in the non government sector where internal offices, workrooms and fittings such as sinks, have not been included in some libraries built under both BER funding and financed through other sources of funding. These were accepted standards in older library designs.

While libraries may require flexible learning space they must also accommodate areas with practical functions such as to house equipment. Space and facilities are required for the acquisition, processing, production and maintenance of information resources.

Some teacher librarians have struggled to achieve genuine consultation with their leaders on library design to address this problem. Funding restrictions and a one

size fits all inadequate design has meant that some teacher librarians have had to battle to have necessary facilities and spaces included, with varying degrees of success and support.

In libraries where these internal fittings and facilities have not being included teacher librarians and library staff will face difficulties in performing some core functions of their work and delivering services to their school communities.

The IEU is not aware of any issues of this nature in independent schools assisted by the AIS in the construction of their libraries.

Recommendations

To avoid ongoing problems with the interiors of libraries and to ensure compliance with NSW OHS legislation it is essential that the planning of new libraries occur in consultation with and between teacher librarians and school principals.

New/refurbished libraries must reflect not only the learning functions, goals and conditions of the individual school, but also the working requirements of library staff.

That standards in the physical environment of libraries contained in "*Learning for the Future: developing information services in schools*" [2] be used as best practice guidelines for principals and teacher librarians involved in building/refurbishing and staffing school libraries.

Terms of Reference 2: The future potential of school libraries and librarians to improve educational and community outcomes, especially literacy.

The future potential of school libraries depends on staffing libraries adequately with qualified teacher librarians where a qualified teacher librarian is available. In schools where a qualified teacher librarian is not employed as part of the school's staffing formula when one is available the likelihood of students not mastering information retrieval, information and digital literacy and thinking skills is high.

Students in primary schools where there isn't a teacher librarian employed risk being behind the rest of cohort when reaching high school in the areas of locating, comprehending, evaluating and presenting information.

In some isolated instances programmes being delivered by teacher librarians in the domains of information skills and digital literacy are under threat from principals, information technology specialists and technology committees who

see the library as a place to fill up with computers for ideological reasons or due to the pressure on space in schools. Some libraries in schools pressed for space have been culled of valuable books to make way for more computers.

The ideology held by some decision makers is that the “world wide web” can replace information obtained from books. In educational terms this is nonsense as the Internet can swamp students with too much information written at inappropriate reading levels. The balance in the 21st century school library needs to be a centre for digital objects and resources and rich in books.

Some examples illustrate the issues.

A teacher librarian in a secondary school recently said she didn't know how she would find the library on her return from Long Service Leave and feared the library will be reconfigured in her absence.

A teacher librarian resisted pressure to throw out a large number of books in an up to date collection to make way for more computers to be installed in the library for more Internet access points. When the teacher librarian resigned a massive culling of the collection and shelving occurred and the library space filled with computers.

In a secondary school the school leadership made the decision to replace the existing teacher librarian with an information technology specialist without teacher librarianship qualifications.

Jamie MacKenzie has addressed these issues comprehensively in his submission to this Senate Inquiry. His view is that “*the teacher librarians have been a bit too polite while their jobs crumbled*”.... He outlines key areas such as student comprehension skills and navigating advanced web searching that require the retention of the teacher librarian and his/her skills. He/She has the potential as a coach of other teachers and has the knowledge to navigate students beyond cutting and pasting information and into the Deep or Hidden Internet where specialised databases full of valuable information can be accessed. In his article “*Why we still need libraries and librarians*” he argues that “*Teacher librarians can be crucial players during this time of change augmenting their school role so they are providing critically important leadership.*” [3] The IEU fully supports his views.

Karen Bonanno the Australian School Libraries Association Executive Officer recently told Newsmonth, the newspaper of the IEU

“Students may appear tech savvy but they are not deep learners. They might have a key phrase and type it into Google but they don't know how to drill down into what is relevant information, what is fact and what is opinion” [4]

Recommendations

Each primary and secondary school both government and non government needs to include at least one qualified teacher librarian per school in its staffing formula supported by adequate ratios of administrative/technical staffing.

School communities should value the learning coming from the library and teacher librarians should emphatically promote the learning coming from the library to school communities.

Schools and professional organizations including unions should provide professional development in effective Internet searching for teachers.

Teacher librarians should continue to be supported by their employers to attend professional development and training to maintain currency of skills in order to assist students to develop digital literacy.

Teacher librarians should take on the challenge, with the assistance of the IEU, of applying for NSWIT Professional Accomplishment and Professional Leadership levels.

Terms of Reference 3: The factors influencing recruitment and development of school librarians

Industrially, teacher librarians in the Catholic and independent sectors are appropriately paid on the same salary scales for teachers and promotions positions as classroom teachers. Promotions positions and the rewards of higher salaries are technically available to teacher librarians.

Higher levels such as Leadership and Classroom Excellence within the standards based independent schools teacher's agreements are available to teacher librarians. The NSW Institute of Teachers levels of Graduate Teacher, Professional Competence, Professional Accomplishment and Professional Leadership are all available to teacher librarians. However, there are obstacles for teacher librarians to the career pathway and promotions structure.

Most primary and secondary schools are not large enough to have a library department with a teacher librarian as Coordinator of Library and Information Services.

Most primary schools have a part time teacher librarian and this can be seen as an impediment to promotion.

Teacher librarians and the library are often not part of the Key Learning Area faculty structure in secondary schools so a teacher librarian becoming a subject Coordinator in a secondary school is unlikely. Without attaining a middle

management positions it is difficult to attain the next tier where there are suitable positions for teacher librarians such as Curriculum Coordinator (a role requiring broad curriculum knowledge which the teacher librarian has).

Management is another skill teacher librarians have as they are managers of the library from Day 1 of their career and manage staff, budgets, book retailers etc. Once a teacher librarian manages to overcome the obstacles to reach higher management tiers in a school the progression to an Assistant Principal position and beyond would be relatively straightforward. The obstacle on the career path for the majority of secondary teacher librarians is the lack of access to a Coordinator 2 position. The obstacle for primary teacher librarians is the part time nature of the positions.

Statistics indicate that there is an inequity in the numbers of females compared to males who access leadership positions in schools. The reality that skilled managers such as teacher librarians who are mostly female are not reaching executive positions in numbers means a human resource cost to schools and a financial cost to teacher librarians many of whom do not progress beyond teacher level if they choose to remain in schools. Many teacher librarians leave teaching to find new challenges.

An adequate number of qualified teacher librarians is essential for providing leadership by

- Working alongside teachers and students,
- Purchasing quality fiction and non fiction resources
- Bringing quality information to users through websites,
- Building congruence between digital and print collections to ensure improved literacy in students in primary and secondary schools.

An adequate number of qualified teacher librarians is essential for a strong profession that can continue to adapt its expertise to rapid changes in technology under the leadership of experts within the profession and professional associations such as ALIA (the Australian Library and Information Association) and ASLA (Australian School Library Association).

Those teachers passionate about the role of TL but unqualified who are at times appointed to teacher librarian positions due to a teacher librarian not being available should be supported by their employer to take every opportunity to acquire the necessary skills for the position by attending professional development; to upgrade qualifications through university courses; to participate in teacher librarian networks such as OZTL_NET and to join professional associations.

The number of universities offering places and courses of study in the field of teacher librarianship and management and information sciences needs to increase to address the reported current shortage of teacher librarians. The

excellent teacher librarianship degree and diploma that previously existed at Macquarie University produced many passionate teacher librarians for schools in Australia before it was discontinued. This course could be used as a model for universities to reintroduce. The course under the guidance of Noelene Hall and Margaret Sim comprehensively prepared undergraduates to become teacher librarians with a programme that included lots of practical school library experience in school libraries of a high standard and a mentoring framework with practicing teacher librarians.

Recommendations

More universities should offer teacher librarian and information management qualifications to increase the number of qualified teacher librarians.

A new promotions position should be created specifically targeting teacher librarians who can demonstrate having met the ALIA Standards of Professional Excellence for Teacher Librarians or similar standards. This would allow teacher librarians to hold a promotions positions yet remain in the library.

All primary schools should be funded to employ a full time teacher librarian.

Footnotes

1. *Standards of Professional Excellence for Teacher Librarians* ALIA adopted 2004.
2. *Learning for the Future: developing information services in schools* (Australian School Library Association, Australian Library and Information Association, 2nd edition, Curriculum Corporation, 2001).
3. McKenzie, Jamie *Why we still need libraries and librarian*. 2010
<http://fno.org/mar2010/still.html>
4. Newsmonth Vol 30 number 4 June 2010 page 7