

To:

The Secretary of the Committee which is inquiring into school libraries and teacher librarians in Australian schools

Dear Sir or Ma'am,

I am a teacher librarian in a government school in New South Wales. I perform a vital role within my school and see the need for teacher librarians to be supported more in the future.

### **1. Resources**

**It is essential that one person, the teacher librarian** – a person with knowledge of current publications and how they meet the needs of children of different age-groups – **has a major involvement in the purchasing of all library resources.** The collection needs to be balanced so it serves its purpose throughout the school, throughout the year, catering for recreational, social, educational and vocational needs of students. This has to be done by the teacher librarian, who also organises and displays the collection, enables and encourages students and teachers to borrow, repairs resources, and culls items when they no longer serve a useful purpose. When you have ten thousand books the law of chaos prevails unless someone with a vested interest actively manages the collection.

If a principal of a school has a budget of \$900,000, they are accountable for ensuring that it's used appropriately. When you have ten thousand books, the collection is worth a great deal of money. A book that used to cost \$10 now costs \$30. While some books still cost only \$12, most are over \$25. That might make the collection worth about \$250,000.

You wouldn't casually hand any old person something worth that much money - you'd want a qualified professional to take care of it. A year two teacher, filling in for a year, cannot purchase in such a way that the collection is built up for future years, because they don't have an understanding of collection development. Please, do not go down the path of removing teacher librarians and expecting the library to be run by one casual teacher after another. With no-one at the helm, this very expensive ship, which could have been very useful to the school, will run aground.

### **2. Modelling**

In about 1987 the New South Wales Department of Education published a document which I think was entitled *Information skills in the school*. In it the teacher librarian was described as a person with the vital role of not only teaching the children how to find and use information, but of modelling that to the teachers. Team teaching was promoted as the only way to go.

Within a year of that document coming out, I believe that there might have been a change of government in New South Wales. Anyway, suddenly, principals were told that the teacher librarian could be used for one hour RFF (Relief from Face-to-Face teaching) per week, and funding was taken away from the school, making it hard for many schools to have the teacher librarian team teaching. In many schools, the teacher librarian became just another RFF teacher, and the role of teaching the teachers how to find information and use it, was forgotten.

**I strongly encourage this committee to fund schools so that the teacher librarian team teaches with every class.**

There has recently been talk about Super Teachers, who get paid more than everyone else, teach less, and spend part of their week demonstrating how to do the job by being observed by other teachers in the school. There may certainly be a role for that, but there is definitely a need for teachers to see how to use a whole range of resources in innovative ways, in different subject areas, and the person with the knowledge and expertise in this area is the teacher librarian, not a classroom teacher (even a very skilled one).

### **3. Confidant**

Even though a classroom teacher is part of a grade team, and has a grade supervisor, sometimes they just need to speak to someone who is not part of the hierarchy but who understands. The teacher librarian is a person that a classroom teacher can discuss issues with, and ask advice from, about how to teach a particular section of a subject area, without feeling a fool in front of their colleagues.

The teacher librarian can suggest resources and explain how they've used them the past. If they're team teaching with that teacher, they can plan and teach the next unit of work together so that it can be of use to both the students and the classroom teacher.

### **4. Curriculum**

The teacher librarian is the one person in the school who has a detailed knowledge of the curriculum in all subject areas for all school years. They can see the links between subject areas.

### **5. Examples from my life. I consider myself a typical teacher librarian.**

- **Resources** – I set goals for my collection and, over many years, purchased so as to meet those goals. I advocated (without success) for the library budget to be increased. I do my best with what I get, which is one-third of the purchasing power of 15 years ago. Only 18% of my non-fiction section is less than ten years old.
- **Modelling** – I team teach with some grades and teach the rest RFF. My goal for the students is to have them experience the process of:
  - coming to the library with a question in their heads
  - working out how to find information from a whole range of visual, print, software and online resources;
  - selecting the information which is of most use
  - then using it in a way that meets their needs.

My goals for the teachers involve having them plan the work with me (mostly done piece-meal, on the run, because there isn't time for it) then teach it with me (so that they can see how it can be done differently, maybe, to the ways they've done it before). This expands their understanding of how children learn, but does it in an informal way because we're just two colleagues working together. However, when I explain that I'm getting those kindergarten children to go on a "family" hunt through the picture books:

- so that they can find a picture of a family doing something together
- because this is teaching kindergarten children that they can withdraw information
- from a fiction book
- and relate it to their own family's activities
- thus building up social knowledge by looking at and explaining pictures

- when I explain this to the kindergarten teacher and, at each step, she says, "That's a good idea!", then I feel I've developed her skill in using picture books with kindergarten as well as helping the children themselves.

- **Confidant** – Yesterday a year one teacher expressed to me her inability to think of good ideas for doing painting with her children. (I already knew that some teachers in our school felt this insecurity with regard to art because I conducted and analysed the survey that identified this problem last year.) As we talked, I explained a technique I had used and suggested an idea. She was amazed. I offered to do this with her after school, so she could see how to do it with her children. I also suggested that we could incorporate art into library lessons if she wished. She said, "Can you do that?" I replied, "Well, at present I'm doing 3D sculpture with 180 children in years 5 and 6 during library lessons."
- **Curriculum** – I have:
  - built up a detailed knowledge of all school syllabuses
  - taught units of work in library that address information needs and involve work in most areas of each syllabus
  - written articles for Scan (the NSW magazine for teacher librarians)
  - been a presenter at local, regional and national conferences for teacher librarians
  - been a presenter at one of the Quality Teaching conferences in Newcastle (having been invited personally by Dr James Ladwig)
  - been a teacher librarian for the past 18 years
  - recently spent two years as a classroom teacher again, to give me a different perspective (so I know what it's like for them)
  - my school has just sent me to both the history and science online previews of national curriculum

I have skills as a:

- teacher
- librarian
- musician
- artist
- scientist
- lateral thinker

I consider that I'm of more use to the school as a teacher librarian than as a classroom teacher.

Yours Sincerely,

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