



Inquiry into school libraries and teacher librarians in Australian schools

Name: Maggie Roche

SUMMARY

1. Impact of recent policies and investments

- 1.1 Inappropriate use of primary TLs to release classroom teachers (RFF) in NSW
- 1.2 Neglect of school libraries while supporting schools in technological change
- 1.3 Devolution - 'at the principal's discretion' robbing Peter to pay Paul

2. Future potential

- 2.1 Need for literacy support will continue e.g. selection and promotion of reading
- 2.2 Information and other literacies - becoming more complex, need greater

3. Professional development - Potential of cutting edge TLs to impact whole school vs

Slashing of consultancy and central support
Deterioration in professional 'climate'
Inadequacy of in-school professional development model

4. Recommendations

I the impact of recent policies and investments on school libraries and their activities;

1.1 Release from face-to-face teaching (RFF)

It's not so recent, but the withdrawal by the NSW Liberal government in 1988 of RFF teachers as a budget cut and the installation of policy that said principals may use teacher-librarians (TLs) was a major catastrophe in N.S.W. No effort was made by the Labor government to right this, and currently the NSW Teachers Federation (NSWTF) is investigating the increase of RFF for teachers, much needed. However in 2007 when additional RFF was allocated for literacy/numeracy coordinators, professional development K-2 and beginning teachers, nothing went towards restoring the lost positions. One wonders if that will continue, burying the issue of the lost positions and any chance the primary TL's role has of being restored.

As a member of the NSWTF *Teacher-librarians special interest group* (TLSIG), in 2001 I wrote a paper in response to TLs' constant requests for support. I wish to submit it to the inquiry. This is also an issue for other states. <http://www.nswtl.net/info/issues/RFF/paper.htm>

It is long, there is a summary. <http://www.nswtl.net/info/issues/RFF.htm> (see Appendix)

The arguments were supported by the research findings of the time. It may seem like history now, but that brings me to my second point.

1.2 New technologies and the number crunchers

The inappropriate use of primary TLs for teacher release (RFF) seems like a fading historical fact to some, however it remains a pressing, urgent issue for TLS who wish to deliver the potential. It is fairly apparent that when the NSW government began making its very thorough and insightful rollout of computers to schools, and then internet provision etc., school libraries went into a holding pattern. Everything stayed the same, nothing moved forward, OASIS stayed on DOS. (The development has been done; funding not provided.) This is opinion only, but I suspect the 'number crunchers' found the techies who said 'Forget about school libraries, they'll become obsolete and computers will take over the world' soothing, easing their budget problems.

Proof of the unwillingness of DET to do anything with or for school libraries occurred when the equity issue of [support class staffing](#)¹ was made known to them. Despite the fact that this only affected a dozen schools, the solution affordable, they made it clear when NSWTF presented the [Log of claims](#)² in 2004 that they wouldn't be spending a cent.

Of course many TLs were at the forefront of technological change, often blazing the way forward, but they have suffered a period of shortsighted neglect in NSW.

1.3 Devolution

Hay and Todd reported on a recent NSW DET online discussion in [School Libraries 21C](#)³ p.38

There was a clear perception that TLs cannot work alone in insuring that the school library contributes richly to student outcomes .. TLs felt hampered, not being able to enact a professional role due to struggles with system-boundedness, which constrain the enactment of the professional role. ... policies and practices in individual schools are shaped by policies and guidelines at the Department level.

Examples include:

- *principal's conception of the role*
- *unwillingness of teachers to collaborate*
- *RFF limits*

- *lack of support staff*
- *inadequate budget*
- *release for professional development*

Barriers also included: *lack of time to collaborate, lack of support staff to relieve the TL from library technician duties, being timetabled to supervise senior students in the library, lack of principal support etc.*

This is no different to the [issues](#)⁴ identified by members of the [nswtl](#)⁵ listserv for The School Libraries Working Group in 2002-2005 which included RFF, support staff, senior secondary supervision, central support and guidelines, training and professional development.

The ways in which policies and investments have impacted are twofold:

1. Increasing autonomy has been given to schools, without increasing the resource
2. Strong central support is withheld

Of course schools should have flexibility, however limited resource, budget cuts and restraints have resulted in a spurious situation with principals having to weigh up one thing against another. Lack of central support has meant that individual TLs have had to do their own advocacy. Hay and Todd support the necessity of this and note that many TLs are functioning at an operational level, and need to move forward and strategise.

I would argue that 1) the recent policies and restricted investment have been destructive and at times oppressive. There are constant stories of petty limitations that are heartbreaking. Yes some are in victim mode, but the 'hampering' of the TL role has weakened the profession with low morale and survival replacing once vigorous discussion of teaching and learning. Since the needs of students are at the heart of all of this, the decline is negligent. 2) The focus should be operational, students and teachers deserve the best support possible, with TLs in turn supported for the priority of effective learning programs. Instead each individual has to prove the value of the position time and time again. Evaluation and evidence should lead to improvement from a strong base position, not just to get to, or remain on square one.

My own experience in the last decade included one principal who thought I was the best TL in the world, followed by one who thought I was the worst. Neither was true, and tired of having to perpetually bring new staff members up to speed I left to make room for someone whose style was hopefully more compatible. It's telling that principal whim has a large part to play in school management. Isn't it a bit risky if this is not supported by guidelines, standards and professional development?

Even more alarming, N.S.W. has just begun experimenting with allowing principals to remove their TL and use the position for something else with the [Devolution pilot](#)⁶. Loftus Public School has gained notoriety with the first loss of a TL in N.S.W.

2 the future potential of school libraries and librarians to contribute to improved educational and community outcomes, especially literacy;

2.1 The media is not the message

I can't pretend to be up-to-date, but I like to look to the future and imagine the time when every student has daylong access to whatever will be the version of a computer. I can understand why some people will question the place of school libraries then. However students will still learn to read by reading. Inquiry learning will still require students to deal with an explosion of information from an increasing variety of sources. Teacher-librarians who are currently sinking under the work load, will perhaps be even better placed to fulfil the

goals. Confusion about the difference between the avenue of delivery and the content will need to be cleared up. I like to ask people what they think is the future of the book. The range of opinion is fascinating; it remains inconclusive. Even if electronic delivery becomes the norm, teachers and students will need support with selection. Just last night I spoke with a friend who is frustrated by her son's reading choices and style. How I wished I was up-to-date and could recommend titles. No parent or classroom teacher can read widely enough to be that up-to-date, surely schools will always need and deserve a specialist. It's a huge undertaking to keep up-to-date with new publishing; using selection tools such as [SCIS](#)⁷ and [Scan](#)⁸ is time consuming, let alone the actual reading and matching to needs. Changes in format won't alter that.

2.2 Information literacy and other literacies

What can be said other than – it's getting more and more complex. There is excellent discussion by teacher-librarians like [Barbara Combes](#) of Edith Cowan University about the various dimensions to this, such as the differences experienced between reading screens and books, and the difference between being techno-savvy and information literate.

It is increasingly important to support students to be critical, ethical and safe users of information and teacher-librarians are well placed to strengthen school's efforts to do that. Wishful thinking won't help students develop skills. The draft national curriculum for *History*⁹ outlines an inquiry based model. Teacher-librarians have been shocked to read that the writers think *ICT tools, such as wikis and blogs, have the potential to enhance students' analytical thinking capabilities p.4* That is the confusion. If only it were so.

There is a way in which it doesn't matter how much becomes digitised in the future. It is the engagement with the content that matters, and TLs will be no less needed.

I had an interesting experience recently concerning the ethics of online use which brought home how much more is needed to be taught, and how many more subtleties there are. I edited and uploaded a [video clip](#) to YouTube for an organisation, with permission to use the footage from a commercial television station. Someone copied the clip to their channel, rather than favouriting it. When I entered into discussion with them, they responded with great gusto. The grey area of ownership wasn't as surprising as the low-level communication. You don't want to read a thousand stories like this, however it illustrates that ethics are more complex and more needed. Fortunately I can say that this young professional has migrated to Australia from a country that doesn't have teacher-librarians, because I know that teacher-librarians teach this sort of thing very well. How can classroom teachers hope to be up-to-date with the changing electronic information landscape on top of their curriculum responsibility? Again, schools need teaching specialists, quite separate to the technicians needed to run the infrastructure.

3 the factors influencing recruitment and development of school librarians

Apart from training, professional development in N.S.W. has become woeful, yet this is one of education's best chances of ensuring the upskilling of teachers in this extraordinary era. An up-to-date teacher-librarian works with all teachers and students, and if they are working to their full potential they work with curriculum development in the school. Government budget cuts slashed consultancy many years ago, and [The School Libraries and Information Literacy Unit](#)¹⁰ has had to cope with a skeleton staff and widening responsibility. Also, government cuts and frequent restructures have resulted in deterioration of the professional climate at senior levels where protection has become as important as a growing flourishing education system. Still historical, but the model introduced many years ago of schools doing their own inhouse professional development has led to a downward spiral. The government induced climate of pressure to support government agenda and priorities has also been limiting. Thorough, consistent professional development is needed.

5 the impact and potential of digital technologies to enhance and support the roles of school libraries and librarians

Does education have a leadership role in society? A national curriculum would provide an opportunity for richer more comprehensive sharing and networking. Instead of teachers exploiting the current, limited generation of networking tools, a forward thinking government could put some resource into building something a bit 'next generation', harnessing the potential, instead of trailing behind. People are doing a wonderful job of using what is available, but a lot of it is ephemeral clutter and clatter while popular tools are chronologically (= not) ordered. At the other end of the spectrum DET resources are password protected, sometimes cumbersome and limited. A national resource could be so much more than the sum of seven states and territories doing their own, fairly private thing .

I agree with Hay and Todd who recommend collection of *school-based exemplars of successful inquiry learning programs, successful collaboration with TLs, and successful uptake and integration of technologies, regularly featured in a publication such as Scan or published on a showcase website* Something easy to access, user friendly and comprehensive would be good, as well as something maximising collaboration and sharing, moderated by experts.

R ecommendations

Support has been given for library buildings, the shortfall is in the staffing. It's shocking to see so much money made available for technology and building, when there has been refusal to spend elsewhere. In summary I think the following are needed:

- more thinking, constantly evolving, about the relevance of the school library and teacher-librarians instead of budget reactions
- restoring lost positions across the country, providing *equitable and stable access*
- explicit recognition of the role of the TL e.g. inclusion in policies and curriculum
- strong central guidelines and support
- separate, adequate provision of RFF staffing, with no expectation of TL involvement
- capacity and support for flexible or semi-flexible scheduling
- adequate clerical and technical support, reducing the waste of TL time and expertise
- better access to more thorough professional development
- training for principals
- *documentation (and easy access) of case studies of excellence.* (Hay & Todd)

I would like to recommend that [Lyn Hay](#) from CSU be invited to speak at a NSW hearing. Also from CSU [Joy McGregor](#) could speak about flexible scheduling however she retired last year and may not be available. (Because of the restrictive culture here, few people have been able to investigate fundamentally necessary flexible scheduling.) Also Georgia Phillips and a team from [The Hub](#), [June Wall](#) and a team from [ASLA](#) and Lenore Hankinson from [NSWTF](#). An example of an exemplary practitioner is [Lee Fitzgerald](#).

A ppendix

RFF in NSW <http://www.nswtl.net/info/issues/RFF/paper.htm>
Summary <http://www.nswtl.net/info/issues/RFF/paper.htm> (provided)
Solution <http://www.nswtl.net/info/issues/RFF/solution.htm>

References

1. NSWTL [Primary support classes and the primary staffing schedule](#) 2005
2. NSWTF [Teacher librarians log of claims](#) 2004
3. Hay, Lyn & Todd, Ross '[School libraries 21C; the conversation begins](#)' in *Scan* Vol 29 No 1 February 2010
4. NSWTL *Priorities for school libraries* <http://nswtl.net.wikispaces.com/Issues> 2005
5. [nswtl: NSW Teacher Librarian Listserv](#)
6. Zadkovich, Gary [The devolution pilot trades off colleagues' positions](#) NSWTF 2010
7. Education Services Australia [SCIS Schools Catalogue Information Service](#)
8. NSW DET [Scan](#) [journal] on the interaction between information & student learning
9. ACARA Australian Curriculum Consultation Portal *Draft Consultation 1.0* [History](#)
10. NSW DET [The School Libraries and Information Literacy Unit](#)

Recommended reading

Hay, Lyn and Foley, Colleen '[School libraries building capacity for student learning in 21C](#)' in *Scan* Vol 28 No 2 May 2009 Especially p.20

Recommended viewing

A brief [VIDEO CLIP](#) of a student at one of my schools reflecting, somewhat poignantly, on his learning experience during an experimental open access inquiry based unit. He would never have been able to read to that depth in once-a-week library lessons, nor without the team teaching that allowed breaking the class into groups and catering to differences.

I've really enjoyed just being in the library, reading at my own pace. ... I've learnt heaps here, more than I have in three years ..

Appendix **RFF in primary school libraries - summary**

Issue	Teacher-librarians should not be deployed as RFF (Release from face-to-face) teachers.
History	<p>Prior to 1984, primary teachers received no RFF. Benefiting from good will, teachers used the library for release when appropriate, (e.g. not at the beginning or end of the year). In 1984 staged employment of RFF teachers commenced. Teachers began to accompany their classes to the library, integrating the library into the curriculum.</p> <p>In April 1988 there was a change of government. In June 1988 the Liberal government announced budget cuts, one being that; <i>Teachers will no longer be required to be present with their class on every occasion when the class is being taken for library and/or other activities (e.g. Craft) by another teacher (normally a specialist). The time thus saved (a maximum of one hour) will be used as part of a teacher's face to face release.</i></p>
Impact	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• There is an urgent call for students to develop information literacy.• Information literacy and inquiry learning is now an integral part of each new syllabus.• Research has shown that skills need to be developed in context.• Research shows that both the information process itself and electronic information use are complex, difficult and time consuming. They challenge both students and teachers.• Research shows that when teachers and teacher-librarians work together, integrating information skills with subject learning, both mastery of the information process and the subject material itself improve.• Using the library for RFF effectively closes the library to all other use. i.e. Library time, space and personnel is consumed, rather than being an extension of the classroom.• Teachers need access to their library, and to the teacher-librarian, with their students.• Weekly lessons can achieve some things. However they cannot meet the needs of a 'learning community'. Information quests require a lot of time and support; at the point of need. This requires some flexibility in scheduling.• Some classes can benefit from weekly book exchanges eg K-2, but one hour per week for that is excessive. In addition, most teachers would like to be involved.• 'All that glitters is not gold.' Giving a teacher-librarian a full teaching load does not ensure the library itself is being used.• A strange message is being sent to students, who never see their teacher use the library, and who are only permitted themselves to visit once a week.• The teacher-librarian cannot fulfill all aspects of their role with a full teaching timetable. e.g. Administration, Provision of services, Seasonal variations• Research shows that teacher-librarians have a vital role to play in planning, promoting, integrating, and supporting teachers in ICT.• Condoning the use of the library for RFF has paved the way for escalating misuse.• This is deterring teachers from entering the profession.• Providing a choice between two valuable staffing options is not a fair allocation.<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. It is not equitable for teachers to have to choose between two forms of support.2. It does not provide equal opportunity for students.
Solution	<p>Restore the second hour of RFF staffing allocation for teachers, that was cut in 1989.</p> <p><i>In the meantime</i></p> <p>Request that the part-time teachers provide the second hour of RFF.</p>

updated 27 July 2002