

SUBMISSION TO :

Inquiry into school libraries and teacher librarians in Australian schools

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EXPERIENCE

- ◆ I began teaching in 1965. In 1975 I was chosen to attend Kuring-Gai College of Advanced Education and was awarded the Diploma in Teacher-Librarianship.

Since 1976 I have worked as teacher-librarian in a number of schools. I worked full-time at two different schools for 10 and 9 years respectively. I have worked casually for varying periods of time in at least 6 other schools. I have been in my present position for 4 years.

I therefore have had a great deal of experience. I have seen the downgrading of school libraries and the devaluing of the position of the teacher-librarian in the schools. The role of the teacher-librarian has become a continuous struggle, as I will try to explain:

CURRENT SITUATION

Struggle to accommodate the situation in NSW schools, with particular reference to primary schools, where t-ls take classes to provide teachers with release time.

Struggle to maintain a library with its varied, complex, frequently immediate and time consuming needs, with ever decreasing clerical assistance. In my present school the library gets approximately 5 hrs 38 minutes per fortnight assistance. The many remaining tasks have to be done by the teacher-librarian in time that should be devoted to the more professional aspects of the job.

Struggle to maintain a professional profile when teachers see me constantly undertaking these activities. Classroom teachers rarely see the teaching activities or the administrative activities undertaken by the teacher-librarian. Clearly, the professional role of a teacher-librarian is not understood in many schools.

Loftus primary school is apparently appointing an inexperienced and untrained assistant to conduct the school library. Children quickly detect a teacher's knowledge, enthusiasm and confidence. They equally detect when those qualities are not evident. I believe these children are being deprived of what they need.

TEACHING ACTIVITIES

My day is filled with responding to the many and varied needs of the children and teachers. For example, in 2009, ~690 students borrowed 20,930 resources. The workload involved in that alone demands several hours of work a week.

One half hour library visit in detail:

Circulation. It is imperative to watch the computer screen throughout all circulation activities.

So, children choose their books...

They form a queue, of say 20 children each holding 2 or 3 books....

At the desk, I record their borrows....

Simultaneously I attend to their reserves, swaps, renews....
Children stand beside me to get "hot" books just returned....
Others want help finding titles or subjects and I tell them as I wand....
The computer beeps to tell me a child borrowing already has the maximum
number of books, or has overdue ones....
We sort that out. Often the computer has "slipped" and not recorded the return....
The child goes to search the shelves....
I try to guide him or her as I continue to wand for the queue...
A child brings me a damaged book to be repaired so it can immediately be
borrowed....
A barcode doesn't go through the system. I manually enter it...
Sometimes I glance quickly glance at the children who may not be borrowing....
Children ask for a tissue, a toilet break, a pencil....

Most importantly of all, I try to smile or say a quick few words to the children as they
come to me, so they know they are not just little jars on a factory line.

Then, one or more times during this process the computer breaks down. It freezes. It
misses returning or recording loans. It closes for a System Check; it goes of its own
will back to another screen. The queue doesn't move. Children come from other
classes with a request or message. Before we are ready, the next class arrives. Some
children have missed borrowing. There are books everywhere, floor, chairs, desk
waiting to be sorted.

Computers. The present NSW library Program, called Thin Client, has been a
disaster. (This is recorded over and over again in our Teacher-Librarians' List Serv).
Phoning ITC (our phone advice technology support) for help when all has failed
is in itself time consuming.

PRIORITIES

What do we need you to do? We need your consideration and support.

These are my priorities:

1. All teacher-librarians need to be trained before they are given the
responsibility of maintaining and improving a complex and multi-
faceted position.
2. Classroom teachers in training should have experience in using a library
and understanding its purpose. So should teachers who have been in the
system for some years, especially those in executive positions.
3. All teacher-librarians should receive adequate release time to undertake
necessary administrative duties (the behind the scenes activities that keep
whole library going.) I have not outlined the many tasks from cleaning
shelves to liaising with teachers, students, executives and parents. Of
course, one of the most essential jobs is the choice and purchase of new
resources, and the processing of them. This year the library has been
allocated \$11,000. The majority of the processing will be done by me.

4. Assistants. Currently NSW principals have the right to decide that clerical assistance be provided as they think fit the job) We need full-time, trained assistants who are there because they understand and enjoy library work.
5. Teachers and teacher-librarians need to be present to work together to foster the children's learning programs. The teachers know their children; the librarian knows the resource stock and how it can best be used. The teaching of information literacy (or even basic library skills) is best done at the children's time of need, when they are involved and eager to learn.

TECHNOLOGY SUPPORT

We need: high level reliable digital resources in both quantity and quality

We need: Immediate access when technical assistance and support are required.

We need: Adequate training for all staff members.
given by qualified instructors who understand technology
but who also understand that each of us learns in individual
ways.

CONCLUSION

It is so important. A well run library entices the children, extends their knowledge and understanding, encourages a rich diversity of thought, increases literacy (demonstrably true), increases children's confidence to ask questions and to seek answers. It is an oasis for some and an excitement for many. A well run library is a happy library. Children use it joyously.

I ask that you give your most serious consideration to supporting and promoting the use of qualified, experienced and dedicated teacher-librarians. The children presently in the education system will benefit and be enriched in many ways if they are lucky enough to have a professional, well-organised library, full of resources, full of achievement and richly full of life.