

Inquiry into school libraries and teacher librarians in Australian schools

Submission to Committee

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My Details

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My reflection on the rise and fall of the library and the teacher /librarian within the Catholic Primary School Sector comes from my personal experience as a teacher, deputy principal and a principal over a period of 32 years.

My view is also coloured by the fact that I am also married to a teacher who became a teacher/librarian during the 80's but has recently had to change her role within her school, as the position of a librarian could no longer be afforded due to lack of funding and other curriculum demands.

1970's (late)

Libraries were in schools on an "ad hoc" basis. If the school had a "spare" room and a willing parent who was able to organise books into some sort of order, the school was able to claim that it had a "library".

- ❖ The children were able to borrow books to take home and read but usually on a limited basis. (Eg 1 per borrowing and books needed to be returned before that child borrowed another book.)
- ❖ Teaching resources, limited as they were at that time, sometimes made their way to the library shelves but mainly remained in the hands of staff and in the classroom
- ❖ "Library Lessons", if provided, were taken by the classroom teacher

1980's

Libraries began to become part of the school structure. "Specialist" personnel were employed and, often, the parent who used to organise the library on a voluntary basis, continued to do so but was now paid for it. Although they were called the "Librarian", most remained unqualified and learnt their "trade" on the job. They did a fantastic job and continued to do much "unpaid" work to ensure that the libraries functioned.

The Catholic Education Office Melbourne (CEOM) began to provide support for this new "group" in Catholic Primary Schools through Professional Development, Zone Networks and Support Groups as well as a support team who could be contacted to provide expert advice.

- ❖ Libraries began to house the plethora of reading schemes that seemed to be purchased to support teachers in the teaching of reading skills
- ❖ Teaching resources for teachers began to increase and were being housed in the one location for easier and ready access of staff
- ❖ New technologies were beginning to infiltrate the system and they needed to be catalogued and housed somewhere
- ❖ In larger schools, a designated teacher began to take "library" classes to help the children become skilled in sourcing books for research and for reading pleasure

1990's

Teachers began to take on the role of Teacher/Librarian within the school system as people from the 70's and 80's retired and/or moved on. The position began to take on a more educational / instructional nature. The Librarian was seen as needing to be a qualified educator. Classroom teachers took on the role but were rarely "library trained" unless they came into the Catholic Primary Sector via the State or Independent Systems.

- ❖ The position of teacher/librarian was in most Catholic Primary schools. Most, however, were not specifically trained as librarians but took on the role because of their love of literature and/or organisational skills.
- ❖ In the larger schools, the Teacher/Librarian may have been full time and took Library classes, which doubled as "release time" for the classroom teacher. (Smaller school either had a part-time teacher-librarian or a classroom teacher who took on the role as Librarian and some other position in the school(eg Literacy Co-ordinator))
- ❖ Regular lessons were aimed at teaching children about books and developing a love for literature and reading. However, a greater emphasis was placed on the primary school child being able to "research" so that they could make greater sense of the world in which they were now living.
- ❖ More money was being spent in trying to resource schools adequately in terms of written / pictorial material and other "newer" technologies.... The curriculum was exploding in terms of what the average classroom teacher was expected to teach and, therefore, know.
- ❖ Libraries were becoming more and more complex and developing into Learning Resource Centres. The librarian was also expected to support and direct teachers to new resources and technologies in the library to enhance the teachers' delivery of the new curriculum. The librarian's educational knowledge, experience, skill and knowledge of the resources contained with the Library were seen as invaluable. The Library was not just for the students but, just as importantly, for the teachers.
- ❖ Some schools began to provide resources for their parents to support them in their role.
- ❖ The Library was becoming the central hub to the educative process for students, teachers and parents; the whole community.

2000's

The computer and related technologies began to become increasingly more affordable and schools were being fitted out for this new era in education. The computer was taking the place of books; especially in terms of research and connecting with the world in real time. Wikipedia, Google and Ask Jeeves etc were the new "Britannica".

Libraries were trying to keep up with this new Information and Communication Technology (ICT) and many of the Teacher/Librarians from the 80's and 90's were finding it difficult to cope with the enormous learning curve that this "new kid on the block" demanded as well as maintain what was now being seen as a "traditional" library. More was being expected of the Library and the teacher/librarian but little was happening in terms of support or funding.

The CEOM no longer had anyone designated to supporting Libraries in Catholic Primary Schools and Local Zone Networks were finding it increasingly difficult to function.

To keep up with the times, Libraries were being renamed as "resource centres". Teacher / Librarians were not being replaced if they retired or moved on. Those not wishing to move from the school were being "asked" to return to classroom teaching. Resource centres could now be staffed by "technicians" and the school could save money by not having to pay a teacher to run the Library / Resource Centre.

- ❖ The Library Lesson had become a thing of the past in most schools and the teacher/librarian was replaced by other specialist teachers in areas such as the Arts, Science, PE or LOTE, which were becoming increasingly difficult for the average classroom teacher to manage in terms of curriculum delivery.
- ❖ Library lessons, if taught, are now taken by the classroom teacher which was the situation in the 1970's.....

Terms of Reference

- 1. *The impact of recent policies and investments on school libraries and their activities;***
 - a. From my experience within the Catholic Primary Sector, all the money that was spent in the past to set up the library and create the necessary infrastructure is now going to be lost as libraries continue to close or be “revamped” into Resource Centres.
 - b. New schools don’t seem to have central libraries but have resources placed around the school in keeping with the open learning model.

- 2. *The future potential of school libraries and librarians to contribute to improved educational and community outcomes, especially literacy;***
 - a. As they are being phased out, none!

- 3. *The factors influencing recruitment and development of school librarians;***
 - a. As there is virtually little chance of being a teacher/librarian in a Catholic Primary School within the Western Suburbs, I would consider that this is the main influence for the lack or recruitment and development of school librarians within the sector.

- 4. *The role of different levels of government and local communities and other institutions in partnering with and supporting school librarians;***
 - a. Governments, at all levels, need to make a stand on whether or not the school librarian is a position “of the past” or one that is fundamental to the support of education, not just simply literacy, of every Australian primary school student. If so, develop strong guidelines to ensure that all children in all Australian schools, primary and secondary, have access to qualified teacher/librarians in well resourced, functional and up-to-date libraries.

and

- 5. *The impact and potential of digital technologies to enhance and support the roles of school libraries and librarians.***
 - a. Digital technologies are simply tools that support learning in many new and exciting ways. The tool is not the teacher. School librarians need to simply add this new resource to their repertoire.
 - b. Librarians will be able to support and direct students, teachers and parents in making good / appropriate choices along their learning journey.
 - c. Digital technologies within a well structured and resourced library will make it simple to move from these technologies to other sources of knowledge / information. One should not replace the other, but compliment each other.