



The impact of recent policies and investments on school libraries and their activities:

The demise of the Teacher Librarian has had a huge impact on school libraries. When Principals are faced with having to reduce the number of specialist teachers at their school they often choose the Teacher Librarian.

I have been working in a school library as a Library Technician for over 10 years. I manage the library at a primary school without assistance and have recently joined the library staff at a secondary school which has 2 teacher librarians and 3 others. I feel that I am in an ideal position to compare what happens at a school with a teacher librarian compared to a school without a teacher librarian.

At the primary school where there is no teacher librarian, I have found that at times decisions were made by members of the teaching staff which adversely affect the library. Some examples which come to mind are:

- A senior teacher wanted all classroom teachers to have copies of specific teacher resources. She used library funds to purchase multiple copies of these books. I dutifully added them to the library collection and issued them to the teachers. A few months later I was instructed to remove them from the library collection and hand them to the teachers as their own personal copies. When teachers were transferred to other schools they took these items with them. The teachers at this school do not have access to those items now and the teacher who made that decision has also moved on.
- Due to a divided campus it was decided to split several collections and house them in a cupboard, without any way to circulate them effectively the collection has been "lost".
- A great deal of money has been spent on the reading program, and although students progress through the levels and eventually develop into independent readers, when it comes to choosing a book to read for pleasure (to reinforce what they have learnt using "readers") the general fiction and non fiction collection have old tatty uninviting books. Teachers don't often teach about literature and the joy of reading.
- A couple of years ago it was decided that the entire school would "study" weather at the same time. This decision was taken despite the fact that the library didn't have a lot of books about that subject and no prior notice was given to me that this was going to happen, so I was unable to purchase new items and have them ready. Students learning outcomes were probably compromised due to lack of resources.

Teacher Librarians are able to effectively manage the library collections so that the collection remains current and balanced without bias, covering the many aspects of Australian life, customs and learning. Unfortunately, without this expertise I have found:

- The general non fiction collection is becoming very unbalanced. For example the "history and geography" area has been ignored because it wasn't part of the curriculum, and until recently I was allowed to provide input into purchasing new items.
- Teachers have bought items for the library without thought of what we already have. This results in multiple copies of the same items or items which are used only once and never again.
- Despite requesting information about the library budget I was advised that I didn't have the right to know. Picture books now cost about \$30 each, novels and non fiction \$20-\$30 and

teacher resources about \$40.00, but the library budget has not been increased in the last ten years. Teacher Librarians manage their own budgets and can make submissions for an increase when appropriate.

- I am still finding books which need to be removed due to their age, ie prior to 1980! New countries now exist, the USSR doesn't exist, science has made many changes in the last 30 years, Pluto isn't a planet any more, the writings of Enid Blyton are quite sexist etc. Teacher Librarians keep abreast of many changes which are happening in the world today and ensure the collection stays fresh.

After seeing the "games" developed by the teacher librarians at the high school to teach Information Literacy, I adapted them to primary school levels with their assistance. Some class teachers have been very pleased to use them as teaching tools, but other teachers begrudge spending time in the library, and at best treat it as a book change. One teacher stands at the door repeating "get your book and get out" as his students quickly grab a book. He is happy when his whole class is in and out within 10 minutes.

Without a specialist teacher with suitable expertise in Information Literacy, students are not being taught how to use a library effectively. They are unable to find answers to simple questions. Students cannot choose the right source to find answers. Students do not know that an atlas could be the best place to find a map or that a dictionary will provide them with the meanings of words. They don't know how to use the library catalogue, they are unsure how the Dewey Decimal system works, they don't understand about encyclopaedias, they can't use an index or contents page. I recently developed a game where teams of students are challenged to find the answers to general knowledge questions by using the library resources. Although Grade 6 were eager to play, unfortunately they couldn't because they couldn't use the library to find the books with the answers.

Teacher Librarians are information specialists and are often leaders in using new technology in the education area. The library at the high school has a very large collection of equipment: digital projectors, digital cameras, netbooks, laptops, microphones, headphones, a streaming system for dvds, flip cameras, video cameras etc all of which are used by both teachers and students on a daily basis. Students at the primary school only have access to computers and we can't use audio books as we don't have listening posts for cds. Subscriptions to online resources such as Online Britannica are considered essential at the high school, whereas the primary school has an old set of encyclopedias – 1998, that's 12 years old and older than any of our students!

I have been lucky enough to gain the support of the teacher librarians at the other school who happily answer my technical questions, and try to assist me in my role of library manager at the primary school. But I know of many other people who haven't been able to build that sort of network. The primary school would gain untold benefits with a Teacher Librarian to manage resources, support teachers and focus on teaching and learning, particularly in regard to literacy, literature and information literacy.