

“Oh, where is a teacher librarian when you really need one?!”

What a difference a few decades make! Back in the heady days of the ‘70s and Commonwealth grants, there was plenty of money for purpose-built school libraries and new teacher librarian training programmes.

Today every school has a school library and the DETE staffing formulae specifically includes an allocation of teacher librarian time as reproduced here:

DETE (South Australia only) Teacher Librarian Time Allocation

Junior Primary & Primary Schools

Peak enrolment figures (i.e. October estimates) are used to determine the library allocation time. Teacher librarians are expected to contribute to instruction time as indicated.

<i>October Enrolment Estimate</i>	<i>Number of Teacher Librarians</i>	<i>Contribution to Instruction Time</i>
Less than 61	0.1	0.0
61-96.99	0.2	0.0
97-135.99	0.3	0.0
136-210.99	0.4	0.0
211-285.99	0.6	0.0
286-360.99	0.8	0.0
361-499.99	1.0	0.0
500-649.99	1.5	0.3
650 or greater	2.0	0.4

Source: *Recruitment Placement and Promotion . Policies, procedures and forms for schools and preschools* (2000) CD ROM. DETE

Secondary Schools

Peak enrolment figures (i.e. February estimates) are used to determine the library time allocation. Teacher Librarians are expected to contribute to instruction time. The nett allocation is determined by multiplying the number of teacher librarians by 0.75.

<i>Enrolment</i>	<i>Number of Teacher Librarians</i>
Less than 500	1.0
500-700.99	1.5
701-1000.99	2.0
1001-1200.99	2.5
1201-1400.99	3.0
1401-1600.99	3.5
1601 or greater	4.0

Source: *Recruitment Placement and Promotion . Policies, procedures and forms for schools and preschools* (2000) CD ROM. DETE

But does your school have a dual-qualified teacher librarian to run the school library? Last year “Backstabber” referred to SSOs, rather than qualified teacher librarians running school libraries. That is manifestly unfair to the SSO concerned, but what difference does it make to the school? It is after all much cheaper to replace a teacher librarian with a library aide or technician. All they have to do is keep the kids quiet and the shelves tidy!

In reality that teacher librarian time has been eroded and corroded by budget cuts, P21 rationalisations and a system that fails to adequately staff these positions. Too often a ‘make-do-and-mend’ approach is used – put someone, anyone, in the library, just to keep it functional. Even where a qualified teacher librarian is appointed there may be little support staff available, so the teacher librarian perforce takes on an SSO [e.g. processing and circulating resources] role at the expense of their teaching role. The misconceptions of a teacher librarian as someone who chases over-dues and shelves books are perpetuated. Teachers may not be aware of the benefits of having a qualified teacher librarian managing and teaching in the school library, because they have never really experienced it.

Back in the golden ‘70s, resource based learning or RBL, was a new methodology that everyone embraced with enthusiasm. Besides the traditional ‘chalk and talk’, we set our students group research tasks. We enjoyed such delights as reel-to-reel Umatic video tapes in the new a/v viewing areas, plugged our classes into audio-tapes across a corral of study-carrels and introduced students to the concept of resource based learning. The 16mm projector, the epidiascope, the slide projector are all gone now, but its not just the technology that has changed. Sure, students now watch DVDs, use digital cameras, and email their assignments. The microchip rules! Anyone can access an enormous amount of information, on almost any subject, very quickly via the ubiquitous Internet.

Do you want to integrate ICTs but don’t know how?

Ask a teacher librarian.

Do you want to stop students plagiarising their work?

Ask a teacher librarian.

Are you overwhelmed by the challenge of implementing SACSA Frameworks?

Don’t re-invent the wheel...ask a teacher librarian!

The fact that students can retrieve several thousand ‘hits’ when searching on the internet, makes teaching the skills of evaluation, selection and organization all the more important. As information specialists, part of the teaching and learning role for teacher librarians is to help students [and staff] to use a range of resources and technologies. Teacher librarians collaboratively plan and teach units of work with subject and classroom teachers to develop these vital skills of information literacy. Many teacher librarians move beyond this to become active providers of professional development for their colleagues within and beyond their own schools. They can be key figures in the implementation of SACSA Frameworks as they have cross-curricular knowledge as well as a specialist focus on process skills and Essential Learnings such as communication and thinking. A teacher librarian who collaborates with a classroom teacher to design and deliver a web quest for example, is helping that teacher to not only integrate ICT [perhaps so that students can move towards their ICT certificate] and prevent plagiarism [always a worry], but also explicitly teach the Essential Learnings of problem-solving and communication.

Constructivist learning theory and the implementation of SACSA Frameworks, as well as the increasing impact of the Internet and multi-media, are all factors that have led educators to re-

visit the RBL methodology. They have also made the skills and knowledge of teacher librarians even more valuable in schools.

Teacher librarians generally become involved in many school-wide activities, sometimes with a literary focus such as author visits, book clubs, wider reading or 'boys and literacy' programmes – who said that computers would be the death of books?! At other times the teacher librarian involvement may have a professional focus such as membership of ICT, PD and Curriculum committees.

Since the library was often the first place to have computers, many schools have come to rely on the ICT skills of the teacher librarian, who may manage the school's intranet or even the school network and web site. Teacher librarians are certainly at the forefront of knowledge management as they implement the new Amlib library automation system. If schools are interested in online learning, such skills and knowledge in their teacher librarian are a great asset.

Apart from their direct contribution to the teaching and learning programmes offered by schools, the teacher librarian also provides many management services such as flexible time-tabling for use of the library resource centre, developing and administering resource budgets, coordinating the roles and daily tasks of library staff and volunteers, liaising with parent and student groups, selecting and acquiring relevant and appropriate resources for the library collection (including access to community resources and information services). This duality in their role certainly makes teacher librarians 'value-added' educators that schools cannot afford to sideline.

The different facets of the potential role teacher librarians can play in schools - Teaching and learning, Curriculum involvement, Leadership, Literature Promotion, Information Services, and Management are presented in more detail in the Role Statement that has been published and circulated to all schools by CoSLA [the Council of School Librarian Associations]. It has also been published on their web site: <http://cosla.asn.au> Extra copies of the role statement can be obtained by sending an email request to: cosla@chariot.net.au

How much can be achieved by individual teacher librarians is determined largely by the support they receive from their colleagues and the school administration, but appointing dual-qualified staff has to be the first step. To this end CoSLA have formed a Working Party with the AEU to look at teacher librarian placement and working conditions. The working party has prepared recommendations for AEU executive to ensure the staffing of teacher librarian positions is addressed as part of the training for AEU members of PAC. It is currently looking for input from any teachers as well as any teacher librarians, for a background paper that is being developed as a constructive first move towards lobbying DETE. This will cover issues such as placement codes and policies for staffing school community libraries. Please send your ideas and comments to cosla@chariot.net.au Hopefully this article has made more teachers aware that by collaborating with their teacher librarian they are investing in their own support system and protecting their own working conditions!

This article was published in the AEU Journal, SA branch, June 2002.

Please note that since this article was published, CoSLA has become SLASA (School Library Association of South Australia) and can be found on the web at <http://slasa.asn.au>